University of Alberta

Speaking in Tongues and Dancing with Ghosts: Semiotics, the Ancestral Dead, and a Redescription of 1 Corinthians

by

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Abstract

This thesis applies the comparative methodology of Jonathan Z. Smith to the study of the Christ association addressed in 1 Corinthians. Beginning with the presentation of a theory of religion quite different from that often found in studies of this letter, I critique the normative use of Pauline theological categories in scholarly discourse, and replace them with cross-cultural categories more amenable to comparison. After identifying the Corinthian practice of "baptism for the dead" (1 Cor 15:29) as an especially poor example of such miscategorization, I search for analogies to the practice in the Hellenistic culture of context. This reveals a strong "chthonic" preoccupation among the Corinthians, which suggests they are interested in establishing and maintaining ties to their ancestral dead. Finally, I compare the Corinthian association with the North American Ghost Dance movement, and explore what significance this interest might have in a colonial-imperial context such as first century Corinth.

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Any number of thanks would be insufficient to express my gratitude to all those who deserve it. As Foucault observed long ago, the frontiers of a work extend far beyond the written page, and so does the authorship. As such, I should thank Tim Langille, Katie Stott, and Greg Woolverton—colleagues and friends who listened as I endlessly bounced my ideas off of them. Their comments helped me refine my ideas at a very early stage, and saved me from many time-consuming errors. Also, I thank Russell T. McCutcheon and Tim Murphy, who persuaded me of the need for theoretical creativity in the study of Christian Origins during my days as an undergraduate at the University of Alabama. I hope they will recognize how much they have left their mark on this work.

I especially thank Willi Braun, my supervisor, who guided and supported this project from the very first. His availability and openness to trying new things with the Corinthian group are what made this project possible. Our conversations led to the project's conception, and our collective curiosity regarding those elusive Corinthians pushed the thesis into directions both exciting and completely uncharted. So, thank you, Willi: without you, I'd still be out there counting the cats in Zanzibar!

I also thank Bill Arnal, whose conversations both refined and challenged my own ideas regarding the Corinthian group. Without his input, the thesis would be missing something (a reference to H. P. Lovecraft, for instance). I thank John Kitchen and Selina Stewart, who sat on my examination committee, and Francis Landy, who chaired. I thank Barb Heagle and Janey Kennedy, because nothing in the University would work without them! I thank my parents, Weldon and Bettye Parrish, who kept me up-to-date with news of home while asking each day, "How's the thesis coming along?" For their motivation, support, and endless love, I cannot thank them enough.

And finally, I thank Elizabeth Klaiber. Our mutual interest in the Corinthians led to our meeting, which led to the development of *another* interest—just as mutual, but less academic. For her boundless enthusiasm regarding my work, her wonderful attitude toward life in general, and many other things too numerous to name, I offer her my thanks and my love.

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Introduction

> [A]s there is no such thing as an innocent reading, we must say what reading we are guilty of.
>
> —Louis Althusser[1]

Over the past two decades, scholarship on early Christianities has begun a theoretical and methodological paradigm shift. The groundbreaking work of Burton L. Mack has established the study of Christian origins as a discipline distinct from more traditional New Testament studies, creating a discourse not based on an exegetical quest for contemporary theological insight, but focussed instead on studying early Christian materials from a social-historical and anthropological perspective.[2] Recently, this discourse has been further established with the publication of the volume *Redescribing Christian Origins*,[3] which documents the proceedings of the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar on Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of Christian Origins. And the fascinating work of Jonathan Z. Smith has consistently helped to bring the study of Christian origins into deeper dialogue with the comparative history of religions, making it possible to conceive of early Christianities as *exempli gratia* for the general categories and theoretical concepts of the academic study of religion. My debt to Smith is evident throughout. In a sense, this study is nothing more than an attempt to bring Smith's methods sharply to bear upon one particular early

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[1] Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading "Capital"* (trans. Ben Brewster; London: New Left Books, 1970), 14.

[2] For a further meditation on Mack's influence upon the field of Christian origins, see John W. Parrish, "Reviewing Mack's Re-visioning: A Review Symposium on Burton L. Mack's *A Myth of Innocence*," *Axis Mundi* (2006), 1-13. (http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/axismundi/).

[3] Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller, eds., *Redescribing Christian Origins*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2004.)

Christian "site": the Christ association addressed in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

Beginning with the presentation of a theory of religion quite different than that often found in studies of 1 Corinthians, I propose a model of Hellenistic religions not based upon the traditional categories of "Christian," "Jewish," and "pagan," but upon the social-symbolic significance of "place" as a locus of religious persistence and change. This theoretical milieu is juxtaposed to the theories implicit in the scholarship on early Christianities and the religions of Late Antiquity, thus revealing the conceptual barricades set up by the assumed normativity of Pauline theological categories in first-century Christianity. Deconstructing these categories and replacing them with generalizations more amenable to comparison prepares me to turn my attention to the Corinthian Christ association.

By examining one specific problem that has been especially poorly categorized in the scholarly literature on 1 Corinthians—namely, the practice of baptism on behalf of the dead—I search for analogies in the culture of context in order to elucidate the "cultural logic" of such a practice. This creates a noticeable shift in the relations between the Corinthian data, which highlights a peculiarly "chthonic" preoccupation among the Corinthian Christians. By bringing together a wide range of scholarship that examines the "chthonic" side of the Corinthian group, it becomes apparent that the Corinthians are particularly interested in (re-)establishing and maintaining ties to their ancestral dead. I then explore by means of a cross-cultural analogy what significance this interest in the ancestors might have in a colonial-imperial context such as first-century Corinth. The answer not only alters the terms of description by

which the Corinthian Christ association is described, but also clarifies the social-symbolic dimensions of "place" by which our inquiry first began. This thoroughgoing redescription not only changes our historical imagination of first-century Corinthian Christianity (and, perhaps, early Christianities generally), but also serves to clarify the theoretical categories by which we scholars imagine "religion."

1) Towards a Semiotic Theory of Hellenistic Religions

> [C]omparison does not necessarily tell us how things "are" [or, for that matter, how they "were," but]…like models and metaphors, comparison tells us how they might be "redescribed" … comparison provides the means by which *we* "re-vision" phenomena as *our* data in order to solve *our* theoretical problems…[It] is an active, at times even a playful, enterprise of deconstruction and reconstitution which, kaleidoscope-like, gives the scholar a shifting set of characteristics with which to negotiate the relations between his or her theoretical interests and data stipulated as exemplary. The comparative enterprise [thus] provides a set of perspectives which "serve different analytic purposes by emphasizing varied aspects" of the object of study.
>
> — Jonathan Z. Smith[4]

It is surely every historian's fantasy to have at his or her disposal the remarkable historiographical tools made available to one Lemuel Gulliver, surgeon and sea captain, during his stay on the sorcerous isle of Glubbdibdrib—a little-known island in the South Pacific, roughly the size of the Isle of Wight.[5] Gulliver's travelogue—written by his chronicler, Jonathan Swift—informs us that the Governor of Glubbdubdrib was renowned for his skill in necromancy that rendered him capable of summoning persons from the dead for several hours, during which they could be questioned regarding the circumstances of their life and death, and could also be relied upon to clarify certain matters of historical interest that the textual and archaeological record had left a bit fuzzy. This was, according to the Governor, the only accurate way to do History.

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[4] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 52, 53.

[5] If the report by Jonathan Swift, in *Gulliver's Travels* (London, 1726), 3.7-8, is to be believed.

Gulliver reports that he took part in this perfect historiography, throwing a banquet for Homer in the midst of all his commentators, teaching Aristotle the history of Western philosophy, and orchestrating a reunion between Caesar and Pompey. He was even lucky enough to hear Alexander the Great confirm that he died from fever and not from poisoning, and to learn from Hannibal's own mouth the manner in which he crossed the Alps.

How disappointing, then, that Gulliver reports no dialogue with the figure of St. Paul, in order to clarify what exactly was the nature of the problems he was addressing in his letters to his ἐκκλησίαι. Nor does Gulliver make any effort to instruct us in the method by which such figures could be raised, so that other historians with divergent interests could write their histories "accurately" as well. He therefore violates the first principle of sound methodology: providing testable, intersubjectively available, and therefore falsifiable or revisable methods and theories by which the scholarly public can collaborate in the ongoing project of accumulating knowledge. He must have had good reasons for this omission. Perhaps he feared that some might abuse the privilege for selfish gain, as the vile necromancer Joseph Curwen abused the spirits of the dead to gain the secret of immortality in H. P. Lovecraft's *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward.*[6] Or, perhaps he himself did not quite understand the method of this perfect historiography. But, whatever Gulliver's reasons, and despite Tomoko Masuzawa's playful characterization of historical

[6] The publication history of Lovecraft's stories is itself a sordid tale. Printed editions abound. I merely refer the reader to the story as printed in H. P. Lovecraft, *The Dream Cycle of H.P. Lovecraft: Dreams of Terror and Death* (New York: Del Rey, 1995), 212-323.

interests as "necromantic curiosities,"[7] the notion of a perfect historiography, and an "accurate history" which would answer once and for all the question of "what really happened?" remains but a fantasy—a pipe dream composed by an Irish satirist in 1726—and not a viable scholarly goal. Other, less "accurate"—but also less magical—methods will have to be adopted by historians who work in the real world.[8]

Resigned to this fate, I will adopt in this study the comparative method outlined by Jonathan Z. Smith in the epigraph that began this section. Following Smith, I understand the dual task of comparison and redescription as a metaphoric, kaleidoscopic enterprise that does not tell us how a thing "is"—or, for that matter, how it "was"—but rather how it might be *understood* in order to clarify a larger theoretical interest. Here, the "thing" that constitutes my object of study will be the Christ association addressed in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, and the theoretical interests will be those of an historian of religion.

Because most studies of 1 Corinthians are directed towards the concerns of New Testament scholars, it seems to me that a redescription of 1 Corinthians from the disciplinary perspective of the history of religions would be a real contribution to this letter's study.[9] I follow Smith in assigning two "senses" to the term "redescription."

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[7] Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Religion and Postmodernism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1.

[8] I have been very impressed by an endnote passage in *In Search of Dreamtime*. Masuzawa states that, since Freud, "representation is no longer to be assessed in terms of accuracy, resemblance to the original, and so on, as if the representation were a matter of transferring the selfsame 'reality' from one context to another, but that it is by nature a kind of transformative act; a change of place (*Stelle*) involved in representation (*Darstellung*) is necessarily a distortion (*Enstellung*) to some extent" (182 n. 8).

[9] I am drawing a contrast here between the methods and goals of scholars of the New Testament, who generally rely upon hermeneutical and exegetical methods to discover new layers of meaning in the early Christian texts, and the methods and goals of historians of religion, who treat religious materials as data for the construction and testing of social theories of how human beings construct and maintain

First, redescription is "a radical alteration of the habitual terms of description" when discussing a particular data domain.[10] This can have the effect of either "familiarizing" or—as is most often the case when studying early Christianities—"defamiliarizing" a datum by translating the terms of description from emic terminology into the etic categories of proper historical inquiry. This sense is closely related to the second, characterized by Smith as "redescription as a result of comparison,"[11] which "avoids the accepted names of [an object's] parts and instead names corresponding parts of other objects."[12] Redescription *via* comparison aims towards "the critical goal of rectifying generalizing categories that both result from and further enable strong comparative investigations."[13]

This attempt at rectifying and clarifying categories will constitute the overarching goal of this study. A number of categories will be subjected to analysis and critique. In no particular order, they include "Christianity and the Religions of Late Antiquity," "Paulinism," "Dying and Rising Gods," "Locative traditions," "Unknown and Controverted Rituals," and "Uncertain and Derived Baptismal Statements." In the process of rectifying, clarifying, or altogether discarding these categories, the Corinthian Christ association will be redescribed via comparison with

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their socio-cultural "worlds." Another way of drawing this distinction is to say that, while New Testament scholars might treat the text of 1 Corinthians as an end unto itself, the historian of religion would treat it as a text in context, and ask after the social logic and rhetorical efficacy of the myths and rituals evinced for us by Paul's letter.

[10] Jonathan Z. Smith, "*Dayyeinu*," in *Redescribing Christian Origins* (ed. Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2004), 484.

[11] Smith, "*Dayyeinu*," 485.

[12] Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (ed. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis; Regents Critics Series; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 13; as quoted in Smith, "*Dayyeinu*," 484.

[13] Smith, "*Dayyeinu*," 485.

select data from the Hellenistic religious period as well as with cross-cultural analogies, thus enabling the Corinthian situation to stand as an available "test-case" for the broader concerns of historians of religion.

Because some space must first be devoted to presenting the theoretical underpinnings of this study, as well as to developing the context for our imagination of Hellenistic religions, it will take some time before we are actually able to turn our attention to Corinth. So, the remainder of this chapter will primarily be dedicated to presenting select data for the Hellenistic religious period. Furthermore, as all data are theory-laden, it will also be used to establish the theoretical framework within which I will set my work. In the second chapter I will examine the scholarly constructions of the "mystery religions" and the "dying and rising gods," as well as the dominant "Pauline" categories which have been held to be normative for descriptions of early Christianities. I will "deconstruct" them and present more useful ways to imagine the data as we turn our attention toward Corinth. Chapter three presents analogies to the Corinthian Christian practice of baptism on behalf of the dead (1 Cor 15:29). These will serve as our strategic point of entry for redescribing the Corinthian Christ association. Chapter four contains the bulk of this redescription. Finally, in chapter five I place the Corinthian association next to a cross-cultural analogy. This will clarify the picture we have drawn of the Christ association while also reflecting on the significance of this study's findings for the larger enterprise of the history of religions.

The first step in theorizing "Hellenistic religions" is to define what is meant by that category. We would do well, from the outset, to heed George Lakoff's warning that "[c]ategorization is not a matter to be taken lightly."[14] Since categories do not *refer* to given data domains so much as *stipulate* those same domains, the scholar must take care with his or her category formation, ensuring, as much as possible, that she or he employs categories that are general enough to be analytically useful without being so vague and over-generalized that categorization becomes a mere exercise in list-production, an aimless enterprise of the sort that Clifford Geertz once compared to "'going around the world to count the cats in Zanzibar.'"[15]

In this chapter, the "cats" I am interested in are those often tagged under the common—though, in my view, extremely problematic—category of "Early Christianity and the Religions of Late Antiquity." There are several reasons I find this latter category problematic. Not only does classifying the data in this way leave room for essentialist notions of "Christianity" as a coherent and uniform social entity while ignoring the enormous diversity displayed in the early Christian sources —a problem that is beginning to be overcome by many scholars' use of the pluriform "early Christianities"—but it also implicitly denies the obvious historical fact that the early

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[14] George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 5.

[15] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), quoted in Willi Braun, "The Schooling of a Galilean Jesus Association (The Sayings Gospel Q)," in Cameron and Miller, *Redescribing Christian Origins*, 45.

Christianities *were* religions of Late Antiquity.[16] That Christianities still exist in the 21st century does not change the fact that the earliest Christian socio-religious formations took place during the Roman Imperial period, nor is "Christianity" the only religion that has survived from Late Antiquity.[17] Therefore, a new category is needed.

I propose the category "Hellenistic religions." This category explicitly includes early Christianities alongside ancient Judaisms, the Isiac traditions, the Eleusinian traditions, and all other religious formations of this time period. There is some precedent for this categorization. For example, Luther H. Martin argues that, although the standard dating of the Hellenistic period extends roughly from the onset of the reign of Alexander the Great (336 BCE) to the annexation of Egypt by the Roman Empire (30 BCE), the period "of Hellenistic *religion* must be concluded with the fourth century CE, for this century witnessed both the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine to Christianity in 313 and the imperial decrees of Theodosius I in 380."[18] Martin was not the first to propose this. Frederick C. Grant has noted that many scholars use the term "Hellenistic" to include the Roman period as well, since

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[16] This is not always an unintended consequence. See Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, for a critical history of this attempt to "insulate" early Christianities from their Hellenistic "environment."

[17] Jonathan Z. Smith ("Here, There, and Anywhere," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004], 335 n. 5) lists a total of six Late Antique religions that still exist in modern times: Judaism, Samaritanism, Christianity, Mandaeanism, Islam, and the Parsi faith.

[18] Luther H. Martin, *Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 6, emphasis added. Martin's study remains one of the best introductions to the study of Hellenistic religions that I have found. His work has been very influential on this study, especially his insistence that the category "Hellenistic religions" be expanded to include early Christianities alongside Mithraisms, ancient Judaisms, Orphisms, etc. Although Martin's assumption that the onset of the Ptolemaic cosmology resulted in unilateral reinterpretations of previously "chthonic" deities as "cosmic" figures is somewhat problematic (a point to be developed throughout the course of this study), I acknowledge my debt to his work.

there is a demonstrable cultural continuity even after the advent of the Roman Empire.[19] At the *political* level, of course, continuity is less obvious, though still present to some degree, and many scholars (Grant among them) describe the socio-political forms of 331-31 BCE as "Hellenistic" and the later forms as "Hellenistic-Roman." However, as their interest lies specifically with the study of the *religions* of this period, both Grant and Martin extend the term "Hellenistic" to include both periods.[20] I prefer this categorization, because it emphasizes the continuity of Hellenistic religious forms with the archaic forms, while also allowing us to study the dynamics of religious persistence and change within this period—a point that will preoccupy us throughout this study. For now, though, the point that should be taken is, because the category of "Hellenistic religions" seems the most profitable way to imagine the religions of this period, I will follow Martin in using the term in order "to designate the religious forms and practices of the many peoples who found themselves inhabitants of the expanded world inaugurated by Alexander's empire, up until the emergence of a Christian world."[21]

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[19] Frederick C. Grant, *Hellenistic Religions: The Age of Syncretism* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1953), xii.

[20] Grant, *Hellenistic Religions*, xiii; Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 6. I am unconvinced by the proposal of Antonia Tripolitis (*Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002]), who seems to maintain the distinction between Hellenistic and Hellenistic-Roman, applying it even to the religious forms. If one were operating under a thoroughly social theory of religion, it *might* make sense not to differentiate analytically the socio-political and religious spheres, insisting that the latter be translated into the former. However, Tripolitis' analysis cannot in any way be described as social-reductionist, especially with her emphasis on the "quest for individual salvation" that she claims preoccupied the religious life of the Hellenistic-Roman period—a quest whose goal she continually claims was post-mortem salvation. While not devoid of all merit, Tripolitis' study is less convincing, and also less useful, than Martin's exemplary introduction, and therefore will not influence this study in any measurable way.

[21] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 6.

Many Hellenistic religious formations display noticeable similarity, both in form and practice, and this has occasioned endless discussions regarding the "syncretism" of the Hellenistic period. F. C. Grant has gone so far as to state that the "main characteristic feature of Hellenistic religion was syncretism," which he defines as "the tendency to identify the deities of various peoples and to combine their cults."[22] While this is a widespread view, Martin has presented an alternative perspective. He does not attempt to explain the similarity of Hellenistic religious forms as the result of "superficial borrowings occasioned by circumstantial contact," but treats them as evidence of a coherent system made possible by the generally shared socio-cultural formations "that allowed the various religious expressions of the Hellenistic world."[23]

I applaud Martin's effort to escape the excessive reliance on the notion of "syncretism" often found in the study of Hellenistic religions. I also agree with his rejection of the explanatory power of claiming that one Hellenistic religion "borrowed" from another. This methodological advance resonates closely with a proposal found in Jonathan Z. Smith's *Drudgery Divine*, published several years after Martin's *Hellenistic Religions*, where Smith argues for the possibility of a comparative inquiry that is not concerned with establishing relations of borrowing or dependency, what Smith terms a "genealogical" or "homological" mode of comparison. He argues instead for an understanding of comparison as an artificial

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[22] Grant, *Hellenistic Religions*, xiii.

[23] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 10-11; cf. 156-57.

"analogical" process intended to produce some cognitive gain.[24] From this perspective, Smith argues, it might be fruitful to consider Hellenistic religious formations as "analogous" responses to the generally shared social and cultural realities of the Hellenistic age. In other words, it might be methodologically better to see the development of specifically Hellenistic religious forms as divergent responses to the generally shared imperial, colonial, and culture-colliding conditions in which the inhabitants of the Hellenistic world found themselves, than as the result of some "superficial borrowings occasioned by circumstantial contact," to revive Martin's phrase. While it is not denied that borrowing may have taken place in every direction, it should at least be clear when treating this data domain that the explanatory power of the analogical mode of comparison is greater than the genealogical mode. For this reason, I adopt Smith's analogical understanding of comparison as a "kaleidoscopic" enterprise as the basis for the comparative method to be used in this study.

The "Setting" of Hellenistic Religions

We should now begin to ask after the conditions in which Hellenistic religions emerged and developed, and also how we might begin to theorize their emergence and development. This will require a description of the social and cultural realities of the Hellenistic age as the "seedbed" from which these religious formations emerged. Indeed, it would be hard to understand their emergence apart from such soil.

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[24] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 46-53.

Fortunately, the scholarly literature abounds with descriptions of these social and cultural conditions.

It is almost axiomatic to describe the Hellenistic world as a culturally unified empire, an *oikoumene* or "inhabited world" that covered the entire Mediterranean basin as well as the Near East. With *Koine* Greek as the *lingua franca*, the Hellenistic world has often been seen as a world community united by a common language and culture, with the ease of travel promoted by these commonalities facilitating cultural exchange between the East and the West, thus providing a healthy amount of diversity to flavour the "mixing pot" that was the *oikoumene*.

This picture is, perhaps, a little too rosy and idealistic. This is because it ignores that military violence was what established the conditions of the *oikoumene*. Although the literature commonly recognizes that the social, political, and cosmological shifts that characterize the end of the Classical period are also the features that distinguish the Hellenistic period,[25] it is less common to acknowledge the often-violent and militaristic nature of these shifts. At the *political* level, it would be difficult to over-emphasize the disruptive scale of the Macedonian conquests under Alexander.[26] Not only did the Macedonian conquests of Persia and Egypt forever transform the political geography of the Mediterranean and the Near East under Alexander's ideal of turning the known world into a universal empire, a *cosmopolis*; they also sundered the previous structures of the Greek *polis* and the ancient Near

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[25] Martin (*Hellenistic Religions*, 4-8) provides a concise summary of these changes. See also Smith, who characterizes these changes as a new geography, a new cosmography, and a new polity ("Here, There, and Anywhere," 330-34). A good discussion of the social and cultural implications of the "new polity" can be found in Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 19-41.

[26] C. Bradford Welles (*Alexander and the Hellenistic World* [Toronto: A. M. Hakkert, 1970]), provides a good study of Alexander's impact and legacy.

Eastern temple-state.[27] The Macedonian conquests ruptured these societies, "exporting" the Greek model of the *polis* to aid in Alexander's imperialistic campaigns. The empire that Alexander founded thus permanently altered the social and political landscape of the Classical world by replacing the Hellenic *polis* with an international, pan-Hellenistic model in which the entire world could be conceived as a *polis*.[28] Though Alexander's empire fell apart soon after his death, the Hellenistic kingdoms that warred in his wake continued to use the *polis* both as the symbol and as the vehicle for "Hellenization." From Syria to Egypt, dozens of new Hellenistic cities were established, "founded by the Ptolemies and the Seleucids as the primary means for consolidating and maintaining their control of the Alexandrian legacy in the east."[29] This ensured that the Greek ideal of the *polis* was gone forever, as the Hellenistic *poleis* were ruled over by Hellenistic kings, whose militarism and foreign franchise did not fit the Greek democratic model.[30]

Part of the reason these changes were so disruptive is simply that they were so sudden and so final that the cultural traditions and religious forms that had emerged and developed throughout the history of these states remained, while the political institutions and social forms that once organized them had vanished.[31] These isolated

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[27] Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?*, 19-24. Jonathan Z. Smith's *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) is an important study of the ancient Near Eastern temple-state. F. E. Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism: A History of the Near East from Alexander the Great to the Triumph of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), is a good study of the long-term effects of the Macedonian conquests upon the Near East, but is slightly flawed due to the "triumphalist" narrative of Christianity hinted at in the title.

[28] Cf. Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 4.

[29] Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?*, 24.

[30] Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?*, 25.

[31] Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?*, 19.

nations were now part of an international empire, and the peoples of this empire were faced with the challenges of reinterpreting and maintaining their religious and cultural traditions in the strange, fragmented *cosmopolis* that they now inhabited.

Alexander's internationalist vision of political and cultural expansion was later taken up and carried out by the Roman Empire. The gravity of the new political geography drawn by Roman imperialism, which disrupted and displaced the "native" cultures of its conquered peoples, was even greater than that of the Macedonian conquests and the Hellenistic kingdoms. One of the most significant and culturally devastating disruptions was the almost total cessation of native kingship.[32] As a result, the experience of alienation, brought on by being subject to the rule of a distant emperor through the mediation of local governors was a generally shared fact of social life, felt by conquered peoples throughout the empire.

Equally important to the social and political changes and, in some ways, equally disruptive was the *cosmological* revolution that occurred during this period.[33] The cosmology of Classical Greece and the Ancient Near East had been built upon the model of a "three-storied universe," an integrated view of the cosmos in which heaven, the earth, and the underworld were considered roughly adjacent and structurally homologous to one another. This structure was "maintained by means of pious homage to the gods at the center of the world…[It was imagined that, to] the

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[32] Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 332; for the standard treatment on the consequences of the loss of native kingship, see Samuel K. Eddy, *The King Is Dead: Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism, 334-31 B.C.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961).

[33] On this see Martin P. Nilsson, "The New Conception of the Universe in Late Greek Paganism," *Eranos* 44 (1946), 20-27; E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (New York: Norton, 1970); Samuel Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity* (New York: Basic Books, 1962); Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion Among the Greeks and Romans* (trans. J.B. Baker; New York: Dover, 1960).

extent that they existed in proximity to this center, humans were at home with the gods within the protecting and nourishing womb of a contained and containing cosmos."[34] By contrast, in the Ptolemaic cosmology, the universe was imagined as a perfect sphere, comprised of a series of concentric (and geocentric) planetary spheres that revolved around an immobile earth. Beyond the planetary spheres lay the "shell" of the universe-sphere: the fixed stars. The lunar sphere marked the divide between the planetary spheres and the material realm of earth, also called the sublunar or terrestrial realm. The celestial, superlunar realm was inhabited by gods, angels, and demons, all of whom were separated from humankind by the abyss of sublunar space. As a result, the Ptolemaic cosmology was marked by distance, in which the deities sat on their celestial thrones, far removed from their human subjects. This seems to have contributed to the popularity of "wandering" as a religious motif during this time, and it is somewhat analogous to the "alienation" experienced as a result of being subjected to the rule of a distant emperor. Thus, the onset of this new cosmology, coupled with the internationalism that marked the political geography of the time, "defined the hierarchical and horizontal framework of a Hellenistic world system and structured the religious forms distinctive to it."[35]

Jonathan Z. Smith has recently provided a brilliant discussion of these religious forms.[36] In the religious life of the ancient Mediterranean world and the ancient Near East up to and including Late Antiquity, Smith identifies three "spheres"

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[34] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 7; cf. Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 331.

[35] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 8.

[36] Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 323-39. Subsequent citations to this article will be found in the text.

that constitute a useful heuristic with which these religions can be examined and classified according to the social-symbolic dimension of "place." They are the spheres of domestic religion (religions of "here"), civil and state religion (religions of "there"), and what Smith terms religions of "anywhere," which can share features with the other two spheres, but are noteworthy in that they are not tied to any one place.

The sphere of domestic religion, which Smith describes as "supremely local," is concerned with the endurance of the family and the community, "as well as with the relations of that community to its wider social and natural environs" (326). The sphere of domestic religion's most conspicuous features are sets of practices that centre on proper relations of household and kin, including modes of contact between the familial living with the familial dead. Ideally, if such relations are properly maintained, there is "no apparent distance to be overcome. Relations are intimate; their continuity is expressed in terms of circulation and exchange" (326).

In this religious sphere, extinction "whether by war, disaster, disease, or demonic attack"—is the most obvious threat, though ensuring the "avoidance of these general traumas remains primarily an affair of civic or national modes of religion" (326). A less obvious, though no less serious threat is that of dislocation. "While scholars have tended to focus their attention on the civic and national implications of exiles and diasporas, forced distance from hearth, home, and especially, the familial burial site is a profound rupture of the presumed endless accessibility of the ancestors" (326). It is important to religions of "here" that these ancestors be accessible, for, although "from the temple-centered perspective of the religions of

'there,' the dead constitute a pollution, interfering with sacred transactions, in the religions of 'here,' the dead are an indispensable medium for such transactions" (327). In order to ensure that the dead are honoured properly, they are often acknowledged as being present in family meals, which are understood as extended kinship meals between the familial living and the familial dead. "The latter present something of a paradox," as Smith elaborates:

> On the one hand, it is crucial that the dead remain in the sphere of the dead. Ghosts, the undead, the resurrected, constitute, from this perspective, a threat to be protected against while protecting them from others. On the other hand, it is equally crucial that there be controlled contact with the dead, that there be a continuity of relationship and appropriate modes of the dead's presence. Hence practices that range from memorializing the dead at meals, to sharing food with the dead, or eating with the dead, often at burial sites…The appropriate form of the presence of the dead is expressed also in general categories such as "blessing," as well as in their oracular or intercessionary roles within familial settings (327).

The religion of "there," by contrast, is the temple-based religion of the nation or the state. Smith describes this mode of religion as appearing, "cross-culturally, as the result of the co-occurrence of at least six elements, although causal priority cannot be ascribed to any one member of the nexus: urbanism, sacred kingship, temple, hereditary priesthood (as well as other religious specialists often organized as craft guilds), sacrifice, and writing" (328). Temple-based religion tends to focus around relations of power, with such "dual idioms as sacred/profane, pure/impure,

permitted/forbidden" classifying and prescribing the relations between members of a society. "Skill in the strategic deployment of these relations requires complex specialized knowledge," leading to the emergence of a priestly class, "as well as the mastery of intricate modes of interpretation ranging from the technologies of divination to the devices of casuistry" (328).

Religions of "there" tend to be organized around the principle of "as above, so below" (328; cf. 338 n. 24). This aspect is what distinguishes the sphere of civic and national religion most clearly from the sphere of domestic religion:

> Rather than the immediate and symmetrical reciprocities of the religion of "here," the religion of "there" postulates a distance between the realm of the gods and the human realm. This distance…was mediated by structures such as kingship and temple, in which the "above" served ideologically as a template for the "below," in which a variety of human activities served to bring the "below" ever closer to the "above" through ritual works of repetition and, when breaches occurred, through ritual works of rectification (328).

A slightly more ambiguous, but no less thought-provoking category that Smith proposes is the religion of "anywhere":

> At times more closely related to the familial model characteristic of the religions of "here," at other times closer to the imperial model characteristic of the religions of "there," [this] third pattern of religion…takes many forms, but has in common the element that it is tied to no particular place. It is, in a strict sense, "neither here nor there." It can be "anywhere."…What [religions of "anywhere"] offer are means of access to or avoidance of modes of

> culturally imagined divine power not encompassed by the religions of "here" and there." At times they may imitate, at times they may reverse, aspects of these two other dominant forms of religion (329).

In the Hellenistic period, religions of "anywhere" seem to "rise to relative prominence, although the religions of 'here' and 'there' continue, often in revised forms" (329). Smith identifies three general elements of the Hellenistic period that offer a partial explanation of this relative prominence of religions of "anywhere," and while I will review these elements, I am able to be brief, because the same elements that partially account for the rise to prominence of the religions of "anywhere" are for the most part the same elements that mark the Hellenistic period as distinct from the Classical period.

The Alexandrian and Roman imperial conquests, and their subsequent (sometimes forced) immigrations and colonizations displaced many native populations from their homelands, greatly disrupting the religions of "here" by cutting off access to the tombs of ancestors. Likewise, with the cessation of native kingship and the establishment of a distant imperial ruler, it could be said that even the homeland was in a sort of diaspora,[37] which also disrupted the religions of "there." In both "homeland" and "diaspora" traditions, we see experimental forms of religion during this period that try to overcome the experience of disruption. "Locale,

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[37] Jonathan Z. Smith makes this claim, first identifying the cessation of native kingship in the post-Alexandrian world as "*the* central fact of Late Antique Mediterranean culture," then concluding that "[i]f there was no native king, then even the homeland was in the diaspora" ("Preface," in *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* [Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 23; Leiden: Brill 1978; repr. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993], xiv). See also Eddy, *The King Is Dead.*

having been dis-placed, is now re-placed. These transformations give comparative advantage to religions of 'anywhere.'"[38]

In the same way, the new Ptolemaic cosmology posed the problem of religious displacement. From the distant celestial spheres, it was thought, the gods' view "rendered the earth small, the human activities on its surface were seen as miniscule, as insignificant" (331). For this reason, the attempt to overcome the distance between the terrestrial and celestial spheres becomes a widespread problem during this period. Thus, "[t]ranscendence of earth, both as an experience and as a source of knowledge, becomes a goal—giving comparative advantage to a religion of 'anywhere'" (331).

The religions of "anywhere" in the Hellenistic period can be understood largely as reconfigurations of elements more characteristic of the religions of "here" and "there." Socially, religions of "anywhere" often took the form of what scholars now term "voluntary associations,"[39] groups that were often associated with households, grouped around a common trade, or formed in honour of a patron deity.[40] Smith argues that these associations "may be understood primarily as re-placements of the religion of 'here' in modes appropriate to the new world order. They do so, at least in part, by adapting elements more characteristic of the religions of 'there.'"[41] These associations were formed in response to the experience of dislocation that I

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[38] Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 331.

[39] Among important recent work on voluntary associations, see *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Steven G. Wilson; London: Routledge, 1996).

[40] John S. Kloppenborg, "Collegia and *Thiasoi*: Issues in Function, Taxonomy and Membership," in Kloppenborg and Wilson, *Voluntary Associations*, 26.

[41] Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 332.

have been outlining, providing "a new, predominantly urban, social location." Smith elaborates:

> Some were formed first as immigrant societies, initially retaining strong bonds to the homeplace. Others associate around divine figures…usually, but not exclusively, of the sort more characteristic of the civic and state religions of "there." The archaic domestic preoccupation with familial relations of inclusion/exclusion is here translated into a concern for boundaries that enclose a restricted and tested membership. While entire households may join such a club, the primary relations are between individuals as members of a fictive kin group…Kinship is forged by rituals of acceptance, of initiation and expulsion, as well as legalistically by the formal acceptance of rules, the taking of oaths, the paying of dues (333).

Although these associations tended to focus on the sorts of divine figures characteristic of religions of "there," it should not be forgotten that, during the Hellenistic period, we also see a flourishing of the worship of chthonic deities in place of the traditional (e.g., Olympian) deities, often imagined to be relocated to the celestial sphere. The reverence for chthonic deities such as Demeter and Dionysus grew in popularity during this time,[42] and while it is certainly true that, in some cases, even these chthonic deities were imagined as having departed from the terrestrial sphere in order to live in the celestial realm,[43] it would be a mistake to assume that this was always the case. To cite an example that will occupy us later in this study,

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[42] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 8.

[43] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 10.

although Demeter did take on a distinctly "Hellenistic" form as a celestial deity,[44] this does not mean that she was no longer revered in her "traditional" chthonic form during the period I have been calling "Hellenistic." The periodizations of "Classical," "Hellenistic," and so forth are heuristics, scholarly constructs, and should not be seen strictly as chronological or ontological categories. For that matter, neither should the distinction between "chthonic" and "celestial" be ontologized: this too is "etic" terminology, a second-order generalization subject to useful distortions and exaggerations. A "chthonic" deity could have "celestial" characteristics, and vice versa. The data do not always perfectly conform to the scholarly categories by which they are thought—indeed, it is precisely the *incongruity* of a datum with its nominal category that may prove most thought provoking.

Persistence and Change in Hellenistic Religions

To make the most of what we have outlined above, it is now necessary to turn to the basic theoretical underpinnings by which this study will imagine Hellenistic religions. In an early article on the topic, Jonathan Z. Smith nicely framed the historian of religion's perspective on this data domain when he stated that "[t]he study of Hellenistic religions is, properly conceived, a study of the dynamics of religious persistence and change."[45] There are several implications to be drawn from such a perspective. First of all, it might be noted that the study of Hellenistic religions is not very different from the study of *any* religious tradition. To study a tradition is, by

[44] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 58-59.

[45] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Native Cults in the Hellenistic Period," *History of Religions* 11 (1971), 236.

definition, to study the dynamics of religious persistence and change; that is, to study tradition *qua* tradition. After all, as Smith elsewhere insists:

> regardless of whether we are studying literate or non-literate cultures, we are dealing with *historical processes of reinterpretation*, with tradition....[F]or a given group at a given time to choose this or that mode of interpreting their tradition is to opt for a particular way of relating themselves to their historical past and social present.[46]

But, while the study of these historical processes of reinterpretation constitutes a large amount of the historian of religion's work in *any* data domain, what is distinctive about the Hellenistic period is the *extent* to which the religious traditions grouped under this heading underwent analogous reinterpretations. This can somewhat be explained as a result of the generally shared socio-cultural conditions that existed in the Hellenistic world, as outlined in the previous section. Due to the imperial and colonial disruptions of this era, most Hellenistic religious traditions existed (and persisted) in their "native" as well as newer "diasporic" settings. While the native traditions underwent considerable reinterpretations and adaptations—the most obvious example being the innovations occasioned by the loss of native kingship—there is nonetheless a noticeable continuity between the Hellenistic and archaic forms of these traditions. Less noticeable, though no less present, is the continuity between the *diasporic* modes of these traditions and the older, *native* forms. It is, in fact, usually by concentrating on the diasporic forms of a religious tradition that its

[46] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 107.

distinctively "Hellenistic" form is described.[47] But such a one-sided focus comes at a high cognitive price, both hindering attempts to identify and emphasize the continuity of archaic elements in Hellenistic religions—both native *and* diasporic—as well as obscuring one truly remarkable fact about this religious period: in almost no instance do we encounter a genuinely new religion; rather, almost every religion under study has had a centuries-old history. This period is so fertile as a case study in the dynamics of religious persistence and change because we are dealing with the "Hellenistic" forms of ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern religions.[48]

But such a conceptual model is not without its methodological challenges and theoretical costs. There are difficulties with conceiving the religions of this period in this way, and Smith, characteristically, is careful to point this out. He highlights the questions most important to such a perspective:

> What do we mean when we speak of a tradition? Where is it located? What are its bearers? Do we mean ideological, sociological, historical continuity? How do we posit the relationship between tradition and innovation? What do we learn by isolating archaic elements in apparently "new" situations and forms?...How far may a symbol or tradition be altered and still be in continuity?...To merely insist that something is archaic, traditional, or in continuity is not to say very much. What we mean by these terms and what we

[47] Smith, "Native Cults," 239.

[48] Cf. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 107; idem, *Map is Not Territory*, xi; idem, "Native Cults," 239.

judge to be the significance of the presence of such elements remains the question.[49]

Smith himself has proposed some answers to these questions in his article "Sacred Persistence: Towards a Redescription of Canon."[50] He defines a religious tradition as the interplay between a "canon" of religious material and a "hermeneute" who continually applies this material to a given situation. These ongoing acts of hermeneutical ingenuity provide the appearance of continuity through reference to the (ostensibly) unchanging canon. But Smith's model, while suggestive, would be of limited use when applied to the data domain of Hellenistic religions as I have defined it here. More useful, for my purposes, is a semiotic model that Tim Murphy has recently proposed.[51] Building upon Smith's model of "sacred persistence," Murphy braids the concepts of "canon" and "hermeneute" together with the structuralist concepts of *langue* (language as system) and *parole* (language as speech-act) to propose a radically non-essentialist theory of religion in the terms of structuralist semiotics. The results are provocative.

Before outlining Murphy's theory, however, it will be helpful to make explicit some of the advantages I can see in adopting a semiotic model to explain religious persistence and change. An unfortunate aspect of semiotic theory, generally, has always been its over-reliance on technical terms, which have rendered it inaccessible and largely uninteresting to non-specialists. But Murphy's model is notable for its

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[49] Smith, "Native Cults," 249.

[50] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence: Towards a Redescription of Canon," in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 36-52.

[51] Tim Murphy, "Elements of a Semiotic Theory of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 15 (2003), 48-67.

ability to explain religious traditions as ongoing products of semiotic constructions and displacements without recourse to problematic phenomenological or essentialist explanations, *while also* avoiding the pitfall of obscurantism.[52]

But before moving into Murphy's explication of the "dialectic" between continuity and change, which we may refer to simply as "continuity-in-change," it will be helpful to provide an advance corrective to a potential misunderstanding of Murphy's language. While Murphy follows Smith in speaking of religion as the interplay between a "canon" and a "hermeneute," it would be a mistake to limit our understanding of "canon" to textual material, or of the "hermeneute" to a scribal figure. To use language reminiscent of the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, the hermeneute is a socio-cultural actor who intentionally arranges certain elements of the conventionally constituted socio-cultural order (i.e., the canon), in culturally

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[52] In this, Murphy's theoretical proposal resonates closely with another, developed independently of both Murphy and Smith, by the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins. In his essay "Individual Experience and Cultural Order," *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 277-291, Sahlins attempts to mesh the Structuralist concept of "reproduction" together with what we may provisionally term the Marxist concept of "transformation"—though the notion of historical change and development is by no means unique to Marxism—in order to account for continuity and change within a cultural order. Like Murphy, Sahlins also relies upon the classic distinction between language as a system (*langue*) and language as an act of articulation (*parole*). Sahlins argues that culture shares this "dual mode of existence" with language: "[C]ulture appears both in human projects and intersubjectively as a structure or system. Intentionally arranged by the subject, it is also conventionally constituted within the society. But, as a symbolic process, it is differently organized in these two dimensions" (286).

Everything Sahlins says about "culture" can be—and indeed, by Murphy, has been—said about "religion." While I have chosen to rely upon Murphy in my discussion above, it seems to me that Sahlins would be an excellent theoretical resource for students of Hellenistic religions. Sahlins' theoretical apparatus, as presented in "Individual Experience and Cultural Order," was formulated in discussions throughout his *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981); see also idem, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); idem, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). Many paragraphs that appeared in *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* are reprinted wholesale throughout Sahlins' work, although in the context of different ethnographical discussions. This demonstrates a long-standing preoccupation of Sahlins': to "mesh" the Structuralist-presentist concept of "reproduction" with the Marxist-historicist concept of "transformation." The essay "Individual Experience and Cultural Order" is the most concise presentation of this theory. Sahlins' reliance upon careful ethnography, coupled with his clarity of thought and accessible style of writing, render his arguments and theoretical proposals *extremely* persuasive, in my view.

patterned ways, and for socially efficacious reasons. One advantage of the semiotic model given by Murphy is precisely that it does not require too strict a distinction between the "social" and the "cultural," as if causal priority should or could be attributed to one or the other. While it may sometimes be methodologically useful to examine the context of a social formation before examining the cultural "elaborations" that emerged from it, in order that one may appreciate the context in which such a cultural construction was efficacious; it should not be forgotten that it is the cultural order which puts the "form" in social *form*ation. Therefore, I use the terminology of "socio-cultural order" to highlight that both the "social" and the "cultural" are second-order heuristic terms, which I employ on the model of semiotic construction and displacement.

Once this point is made explicit, a discussion of Murphy's semiotic theory of religion will prove useful. One of the most interesting things about this theory is its intentional contrast with and correction of the preoccupation with "origins" often found in works on theory of religion.[53] This is because a semiotic theory of religion "does not seek the origins of a phenomenon, religious or otherwise, but rather traces out the scenes of its transformations."[54] A semiotic theory holds that all religions

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[53] See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959); idem, "The Quest for the 'Origins' of Religion," in *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) for the clearest examples of this type of scholarship. The best critical evaluation of this scholarly tradition is the work of Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime*; idem, "Origin," in *Guide to the Study of Religion* (ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon; London: Cassell, 2000), 209-24. Masuzawa's work is heavily influenced by the poststructuralism of Michel Foucault, especially the essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader* (ed. Paul Rabinow; New York: Pantheon, 1984). A forthcoming volume by Gary Lease (*In Search of Origins: An Introduction to a Theory of Religion* [London: Equinox]), also seems to be intended as a critique of such scholarship on the "origin" of religion.

[54] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 49. See also Murphy, "Discourse," in Braun and McCutcheon, *Guide to the Study of Religion*, 398, which makes clear the utility of semiotic/discourse theory to the study of

"originate' by transforming, combining, or even inverting pre-existing cultural materials," thus enabling us profitably to ask after "the *conditions* which brought about acts of transformation, dissemination, incorporation, contestation, or preservation of this pre-existent material" in the first place.[55] Murphy builds upon Smith's insight that religious continuity and innovation lies in the interplay of a canon of signs and a hermeneute who applies that canon to particular circumstances. This "dynamic, yet bounded process defines the concept of a religious tradition without resort to problematic substantialist or essentialist notions of historical continuity."[56] If a "religious tradition" is defined in this way, then the dynamics of religious persistence and change within these traditions can be further theorized if the relationship between canon and hermeneute is framed in terms of structuralist semiotics. Murphy suggests "that the canon stands in relation to the hermeneute in

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Christian origins by pointing to the scholarly debates over the sources of the New Testament, noting that

> [s]cholars argue that we can find historical influences from Platonism, Stoicism, Gnosticism, mystery religions, Jewish apocalypticism, and even early rabbinic Judaism [in the text of the New Testament]. Typically, a scholar will argue for the more or less exclusive influence of one of these factors on a particular section of the text. Discourse theory would see all of these as the "already" of the text, that is, those fragments of discourse which precede the text, and of which the text is itself composed. Consequently, the text is plural: it is an ensemble of all these discourses, each sometimes more and sometimes less foregrounded. Discourse theory would refuse to reduce the text to its social context, for that too is plural, nor would it reduce the text to the author's intentions. Finally, mere etymology of terms, as in traditional biblical exegesis, would not suffice, because the terms derive their meaning by their place within a specific, historic discourse.

This is an exemplary summation of the methodological and theoretical advances that a semiotic perspective has to offer the study of Christian origins: removing the notion of the possibility of a "pure," sutured text (or identity) free of any "influence' from the surrounding "environment" dispenses with the crypto-theological assumptions that have so often defined the enterprise and allows us instead to treat all Hellenistic religions as historical products on an historical plane.

[55] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 50-51, emphasis added.

[56] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 53.

very much the same way the field of association, or paradigm, stands in relation to the combinatory process, or syntagm."[57] Or,

> the canon is the lexicon of a language, the sum of possible resources for making sentences out of words, while the activity of the hermeneute, that is, the activity of interpretation, is the act of combining words into sentences. In the encompassing definition of language, both are essential: a "language" *is* just its vocabulary and its rules of grammar, i.e., its rules for the combination of words. Similarly, a religion is both its canon and its interpretation of that canon.[58]

The strength of Murphy's theory is that it is able to account not only for the *persistence* of a religious tradition,[59] but also its *change*. Just as, in language, words develop new meanings as they are deployed and re-deployed in new ways, so too religious traditions change and adapt as they are interpreted and reinterpreted. As Murphy makes clear, "[t]he perpetuity of a canon, or at least the appearance of such perpetuity, forms one pole of the dynamic of continuity of a religious tradition. Adaptation *via* interpretation forms the other pole."[60] So, the interplay between canon and hermeneute allows not only for the "reproduction" of a religious tradition, but also its "transformation."

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[57] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 53.

[58] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 53.

[59] Murphy uses the term "canon" to refer to what I am calling a "religious tradition," and I sometimes mimic this usage. However, as discussed above, I wish to stress that neither for myself nor for Murphy does "canon" refer simply to a body of textual material. Rather, Murphy radically extends the concept "canon" to refer to the almost infinite body of pre-existing social forms and cultural material that confronts the subject, or "hermeneute."

[60] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 57.

Not content merely with describing the relation of canon and hermeneute in terms of paradigm and syntagm, Murphy also attempts to account for a basic fact: "the *reason* for speaking (writing, acting, gesturing, interpreting, or any species of signification)."[61] This is the notion that will prove most useful to us when trying to theorize Hellenistic religions on a semiotic model. Murphy correlates the act of interpreting a canon with the structuralist concept of *enunciation*, and points to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to show that "[a]n essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance [or enunciation] is its quality of being directed to someone [or, we may add, something], its addressivity."[62] In other words, the interpretation of a canon, like any act of enunciation, is always *addressed to* something or someone, and is always performed in *response to* something or someone.

"Enunciation" therefore specifies the process in which the socio-cultural order is manipulated by historic agents in response to pre-existing socio-cultural conditions. It stands to reason that the semiotic material manipulated in these acts of enunciation will take on new, unpredictable—yet always culturally-patterned—significance as a result of these deployments, without any necessary laws of re-deployment except that each enunciation must make "cultural sense." This semiotic model thus obviates the search for origins, for reasons illustrated in a well-known passage from Nietzsche:

> [T]he cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to

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[61] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 59, emphasis added.

[62] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Bakhtin Reader* (ed. Pam Morris; London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 89, as quoted in Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 59.

> new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a *subduing*, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous "meaning" and "purpose" are necessarily obscured or even obliterated.[63]

This passage demonstrates the fallacy of assuming that the "origin" of a religious tradition adheres to, and is contained within, everything that is subsequently formulated within that tradition, like a viscous *Geist* that stubbornly sticks to the believers' fingertips. Nor does the "origin" already contain everything that *could be* formulated within this discourse, as if a metaphysical plenitude resided in experience before the "fall" into discourse. No: the "Eden" model of creation and fall does not apply here, nor does the "essence and manifestation" theory. While essentialist or substantialist theories presume fundamental continuity between different moments in the history of a religion by positing that the diverse modes of a given religion are all "manifestations" of the same "essence," a semiotic theory of religion as Murphy (following Nietzsche) and I (following Murphy) understand it, looks for moments of discontinuity and transformation. Where a religion appears to have a ceaseless, continuous, genetic, even teleological development from its origin to its present formulation, the historian of religion who assumes a semiotic model sees, like Nietzsche, a "subduing" of previous interpretations in service of a new interpretation done in response to new conditions. The previous enunciations are either redeployed in service of this new interpretation, or are silenced entirely, thus allowing the

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[63] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* (trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale; New York: Vintage, 1967), 77, emphasis original.

appearance of continuity. From this perspective, then, "tradition" is not marked by continuity of meaning, but by coincidence of tropes. The general sense of this operation is nicely captured in Hayden White's useful term, "retroactive confiscations."[64]

So, Murphy argues, "the very constitution of a canon, a tradition, and a tradition of interpretation, can be [the] compressed, congealed, and concealed [product] of numerous contests, each of which vies as a silent or silenced voice, to name the meaning of the whole."[65] So, "the entire history of a 'thing,' an organ, a custom can in this way be a continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and rearrangements whose causes do not even have to be related to one another but, on the contrary, in some cases succeed and alternate with one another in a purely chance fashion."[66] Thus, Murphy concludes, "[a]s the interplay of address and addressee, there can be no laws, no determinism [and no essence] in the history of a canon, of a religion, of anything whose substance is semiotic. One can only trace out the varying and various scenes of these contests."[67] As Michel Foucault has stated in a different context, for one who takes seriously this understanding of interpretation as confiscation, an instance of enunciation "must not be referred to the distant presence of the [so-called] origin, but treated as and when it occurs."[68]

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[64] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 363, quoted in Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 61.

[65] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 62.

[66] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 77, quoted in Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 62.

[67] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 62.

[68] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* (trans. A. M. Sheridan; New York: Pantheon, 1972), 25.

The perspective Murphy outlines, and the concept of a "religious tradition" that he offers, has great relevance to the study of Hellenistic religions. For, if this enterprise is conceived as the study of the dynamics of religious persistence and change, then adopting a semiotic perspective on these dynamics will enable us to put forth a radical re-visioning of this data domain. As noted above, one of the most striking facts about the Hellenistic period is that in almost no case do we encounter a "new" religion that is not better understood as a "newer" form of an old religion. Rather, we encounter ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern religions that have had centuries-long histories. We study these religions of Mediterranean and Near Eastern antiquity in their Hellenistic phases. And, quite often, the Hellenistic modes of these diverse traditions all display analogous innovations from their archaic forms. This *could* be explained by saying that these religions "borrowed" from one another in a "syncretistic" process. But this is not sufficient if "syncretistic religion" is a redundant term.[69] Nor is it explanatorily powerful simply to say one religion borrowed from another. *Why* did these religions "borrow" their symbols and concepts from other traditions? Why was it a "good idea" to "borrow"? Why was it rhetorically efficacious to represent oneself religiously using the concepts of another tradition? Most importantly, what human interests were served by discursively presenting the gods in similar ways? These are questions that genealogical comparisons cannot answer.

[69] So Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 50-51.

On the other hand, if we recall the "addressivity" that we have theorized for all acts of enunciation, including religious (re-)interpretations, then the fact that most religions were experiencing reformations and innovations during this time, and that these reformations and innovations, though morphologically divergent, were nonetheless analogous, becomes a significant datum. Doubtless this is partially explainable by the generally shared colonial and imperial conditions of the period. One does not need to posit genealogical continuity between analogous religio-cultural representations, if it is realized that these representations may simply appear similar because they are addressed to similar socio-cultural conditions: that, at the level of socio-cultural "logic," these reinterpretations are analogous because they are attempts to solve the same problems. In short, they are "responses" that are "addressed" to the same (or roughly the same) sets of social and cultural pressures, with an eye to solving them. Jonathan Smith has suggested that this phenomena be understood on the model of J. S. Mill's "concomitant variation," which "admits but does not necessarily postulate causal interrelatedness," [70] and thus avoids stronger, more deterministic theories of causality; claiming, instead, that these generally shared conditions *occasioned* these analogous reinterpretations, but did not *cause* them—an important qualification. The distinctively "Hellenistic" forms of these religious traditions can therefore be understood as analogous responses to the socio-cultural realities of the Hellenistic age.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that these reinterpretations completely obliterated the old forms of tradition. Recalling Smith's model, we should

[70] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Social Formations of Early Christianities: A Response to Ron Cameron and Burton Mack," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (1996), 275.

not forget that, while religions of "anywhere" rise to relative prominence during this period, religions of "here" and "there" also persist, albeit in changed form. This datum suggests we need to supplement Murphy's theory with another model for understanding the shift from Classical to Hellenistic religious forms. Recently, Bruce Lincoln has formulated a theory of religion in the "ancient" and the "post-ancient" world that will prove very useful to this end.[71] Concerning himself with the problem of which characteristics make a religion "ancient" or not, Lincoln characterizes the "ancient" world as "that situation in which religion is not one system of culture coexisting among many others, but occupies the central position and plays a unique role—informing, inflecting, integrating, stabilizing, even at times controlling and determining all others."[72] So, in the ancient world, religion had its fingers in everything. However, Lincoln makes clear that "[t]o say that nothing in antiquity was free of religion…is to say not that everything 'was' religious, only that religious concerns were part of all else."[73] To illustrate this, Lincoln theorizes "the ancient" as "that situation where…one treats toothache by reciting the account of creation, reads the organs of sacrificial victims before waging battle, secures the verity of speech acts with sacred oaths, and conducts international diplomacy through appeals to mythic genealogy."[74]

In light of this, it is possible to suggest that in the ancient period, "religion was a shared concern of groups existing at familial, civic, ethnic, and national levels

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[71] Bruce Lincoln, "Epilogue," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (ed. Sarah Iles Johnston; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 657-67.

[72] Lincoln, "Epilogue," 657.

[73] Lincoln, "Epilogue," 657-58.

[74] Lincoln, "Epilogue," 658.

of integration. The collective identity of such group was…based simultaneously on territory, language, polity, kinship, and laws, as well as the religion that members held in common and that, in turn, held them."[75] By contrast, the post-ancient "saw the emergence of communities based primarily—and also most explicitly and emphatically—on religious considerations, integrating persons who might be divided by geography, language, culture, or citizenship."[76] Lincoln's arguments become relevant to our own discussion when, recognizing the danger that his distinction between "ancient" and "post-ancient" might be taken as an ontological shift rather than a scholarly heuristic, he explicitly states that we should understand and examine these shifts by reference to a "polythetic" set of criteria—highlighting features which seem to characterize one period as distinct from the other, though these periods are not entirely distinct, and there is a great deal of overlap—rather than distinguishing, wholesale, between one or the other.

I would argue that we should understand the religious shift from the Classical to the Hellenistic period in much the same way. In terms of our semiotic theory of religion, we might say that the social and cosmological shifts that occurred in the wake of the Macedonian and Roman conquests occasioned new interpretations of the pre-existing religio-cultural "canon," done in response to changed conditions. From a semiotic perspective, the emergence of new forms of older religions is comparable to the emergence of genres as described by Tzvetan Todorov:

> Where do genres come from? Quite simply from other genres. A new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or of several: by inversion, by

[75] Lincoln, "Epilogue," 663.

[76] Lincoln, "Epilogue," 663.

> displacement, by combination…There has never been a literature without genres; it is a system in constant transformation, and historically speaking the question of origins cannot be separated from the terrain of the genres themselves. Saussure noted that "the problem of the origin of a language is not a different problem from that of its transformation. As Humboldt had already observed: "When we speak of primitive languages, we employ such designations only because of our ignorance of their earlier constituents."[77]

Just as new genres come from other genres, but do not necessarily obliterate the older genres in the process—that is to say, genre *x* can come from genres *y* and *z*, so that now we have three distinct genres, with *x* being a hybrid amalgamation of genres *y* and *z*—so too can new forms of religious traditions emerge without thereby destroying the earlier modes of that tradition. Because these sorts of transformations are the norm, the term "syncretism," which has so often been used to characterize Hellenistic religions, now seems to be of limited use. Many scholars now prefer the term "hybridity" in place of the older "syncretism," but it seems to me that either term will suffice, *if* it is realized that all religion is, from a certain perspective, "syncretistic." As all religious traditions are redeployments of pre-existing cultural material in a more aggressively symbolic manner, it is clear why Murphy bluntly states: "[s]yncretistic religion is a redundant term."[78] To continue the above example of religions *x*, *y*, and *z*, it would be a mistake to think that religion *x* is the only "hybrid." Religion *y* "originated" by redeploying material from traditions *p* and *q*, just

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[77] Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse* (Cambridge, 1990), 15; quoted in Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 50.

[78] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 50-51.

as religion *z* may have "originated" by redeploying materials from traditions *a*, *t*, *w*, and *r*. Contrary to older, essentialist theories, from a semiotic perspective, there is no true, monogenetic "origin" to religion.[79]

Illustrating "Polygenesis"

To illustrate the concepts I have been outlining, and also to test the theory they build, it will be helpful to present a series of concrete "test cases." Two of the three cases I will examine in this section have been chosen because they have so often been pointed to as evidence for "syncretism," and so have great relevance for the theoretical perspective I am advancing. While I do not deny that they may indeed be evidence for "syncretism," I think they may also be evidence for something else. The third example is included precisely because it has *not*, as a general rule, been considered evidence for syncretism or, indeed, any other theoretical concept. It is my hope that the model I am presenting may change that. The three cases I will examine are, in order, the deities Sabazios, Isis, and Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the classic case study in Hellenistic syncretism has been the complex figure of Sabazios, a Phrygian-Thracian deity who, over the course of his history, was associated with an enormous number of other gods.[80] This in itself is not unusual, of

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[79] See now the splendid volume by Anita Maria Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, *Syncretism: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2005), which provides a host of discussions and proposals for how to understand the term "syncretism," as well as suggestions for its continued usage in the study of religion. Though I will not explore the topic further in this study, Leopold and Jensen's volume is indispensable for anyone wishing seriously to study the concept "syncretism."

[80] Two good studies of Sabazios are W. O. E. Oesterly, "The Cult of Sabazios," in *The Labyrinth: Further Studies in the Relation Between Myth and Ritual in the Ancient World.* (ed. S. H. Hooke; London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1935), 113-158; and Sherman E. Johnson, "The

course: other Hellenistic gods had complex histories, as well. The traditions of Dionysus, for instance, were blended with the Orphic myths to produce a new set of traditions revolving around the figure of Zagreus;[81] and Dionysus was also part of a complex equation with the Egyptian Osiris, as evinced by Herodotus (*Hdt.* II.144) and Plutarch (*De Is. et Os.* 34), not to mention Plutarch's further identification of this Dionysus/Osiris with the figure of Sarapis![82] But few Hellenistic deities display the complexity of Sabazios. Over the course of his history, Sabazios was either associated or equated with Dionysus, Attis, the Dioscuri twins Castor and Polydeuces/Pollux, Mithras, Mên, Cybele, Artemis, and Demeter.[83] Most striking of all is the apparent equation, reported to us by Valerius Maximus (1.32), of the Jewish deity Yahweh Sebaoth, the "Lord of Hosts," with Sabazios, to produce the figure of Yahweh Sabazios or Jupiter Sabazios.[84]

This deity would seem to be *the* prime example of Hellenistic syncretism, and indeed has been declared such by more than one scholar.[85] The geographical extent of his cult is expansive: evidence has been found in Athens, Macedonia, Thrace, and Rome; as far east in Asia Minor as Cappadocia and Cilicia; throughout Liguria, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Britain, Gaul, Spain, North Africa, and

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Present State of Sabazios Research," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.17.3 (1984), 1583-1613.

[81] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 98-102.

[82] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 91.

[83] Johnson, "The Present State of Sabazios Research," 1600.

[84] Johnson, "The Present State of Sabazios Research," 1602-1607.

[85] Oesterly ("The Cult of Sabazios," 115), for instance, declares Sabazios' worship to be a "striking" example of Hellenistic religious syncretism; and Johnson ("The Present State of Sabazios Research," 1583) notes that Sabazios has been of interest primarily to students of Hellenistic syncretism.

Egypt—all across the Empire, it would seem.[86] But the apparent continuity is deceptive, as the name "Sabazios" is actually an amalgamation of many distinct, yet similar-sounding names. "Sabazios" is most frequently referred to as Σαβάζιος or Sabazius in literary sources. These titles are also common in Lydia, Pergamon, Asia Minor, Greece, Thrace, and Rome.[87] The deity's title varies in Dacia (Σεβάσιος, Sabasius), Praeneste (Zabasius), and North Africa (Zabazius), but these would seem to be mere variations upon the more common name. However, in Phrygia, it is not uncommon to encounter titles such as Σαυάζιος, Σαουάζος, or Σαάζιος in inscriptional evidence, suggesting that the native name of this deity was Sawazis or Savazis.[88] Another title, Σαββαθικός, may be related to the Hebrew *sabbath* or *sebaoth*, but it also may refer to a deity named Sabbatistes.[89]

The etymology of the "Sabazios" label is usually explained by a reference found in Aristophanes' "Wasps" (8-10) that identifies Sabazios as the god of beer. If so, this would explain the connection with Dionysus: for, if Dionysus is the god of wine and drunken revelry, then Sabazios would seem to be the god of beer and drunken slumber. In other words, Aristophanes refers to Sabazios as the god of passing out.

But there is a difficulty with accepting this derivation of the term. For, as Sherman E. Johnson says, "it is only in literary sources, usually hostile ones, that Sabazios is identified with Dionysos; almost without exception when inscriptions

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[86] Johnson, "The Present State of Sabazios Research," 1584-85.

[87] Johnson, "The Present State of Sabazios Research," 1585.

[88] Johnson, "The Present State of Sabazios Research," 1585.

[89] Johnson, "The Present State of Sabazios Research," 1585; cf. 1585 n. 10.

make an equation it is with Zeus-Jupiter."[90] The hostile nature of these sources may render them suspect, but they do alert us to an intriguing possibility, in light of the discussion of semiotic theory presented in the previous section. Perhaps it is better to dispense with a genealogical perspective of the Sabazios cult, which would argue that Sabazios was a Thracian deity brought to Asia Minor by the Phrygians,[91] whose worship then spread from Asia Minor to all parts of the Mediterranean and beyond. This model, though not altogether implausible, has trouble accounting for the diverse and varied nature of the "Sabazios" labels, to say nothing of the conflicting etymologies and the sheer volume of equations with other deities. Why not rather assume that the "Sabazios" tradition represents a "confiscation" of diverse traditions, all originally independent of one another, that were later synthesized under the rubric of one "syncretistic" deity, known as "Sabazios"? Certainly the various names displayed in our evidence— Σαβάζιος, Sabazius, Σεβάσιος, Sabasius, Zabasius, Zabazius, Σαυάζιος, Σαουάζος, or Σαάζιος, Sawazis, Savazis, Σαββαθικός, and Sabbatistes—are similar-sounding enough that they could conceivably have originated independently of any "borrowing" or "dependence" upon one another, and then, through a process of "mutual recognition," been synthesized into one deity. In the Hellenistic religious period, deities were equated with one another despite enormous differences in name, iconography, and mythical presentation, so it is hardly implausible to consider that a deity like "Sabazios"—the "syncretistic" deity *par excellence*—should be a synthetic product of concomitant variation and retroactive

[90] Johnson, "The Present State of Sabazios Research," 1586.

[91] Johnson, "The Present State of Sabazios Research,"1587.

confiscation. Once again, from a semiotic perspective, "tradition" is not defined by continuity of meaning, but by coincidence of tropes.

In making this point, I rely closely upon an insight presented by William E. Arnal and Willi Braun in their article "Mythmaking and Social Formation: Theses on Key Terms,"[92] presented to the Society of Biblical Literature's Seminar on Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of Christian Origins. There, they suggest the term "polygenetic proliferation" to describe what I have followed Smith in naming "concomitant variation," and cite at length the following passage from Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.5, which they claim—and I agree—is strong evidence for the "mutual recognition" among various religions in the Hellenistic period:

> Behold Lucius I am come, thy weeping and prayers has {*sic*} moved me to succor thee. I am she that is the natural mother of all things, mistress and governess of all the elements, the initial progeny of worlds, chief of powers divine, queen of heaven, the principal of the gods celestial, the light of the goddesses: at my will the planets of the air, the wholesome winds of the seas, and the silences of hell be disposed; my name, my divinity is adored throughout all the world in diverse manners, in variable customs and in many names, for the Phrygians call me Pessinuntica, the mother of the gods; the Athenians call me Cecropian Artemis; the Cyprians, Paphian Aphrodite; the Candians, Dictyanna; the Sicilians, Stygian Proserpine; and the Eleusians call me Mother of Ceres. Some call me Juno, others Bellona of the Battles, and still others Hecate. Principally the Ethiopians, who dwell in the Orient, and

[92] William E. Arnal and Willi Braun, "Mythmaking and Social Formation: Theses on Key Terms," in Cameron and Miller, *Redescribing Christian Origins*, 459-67.

the Egyptians, who are excellent in all kind of ancient doctrine and by their proper ceremonies accustomed to worship me, do call me Queen Isis.

If it is possible for social actors in the Hellenistic period to equate the goddess Isis with such diverse and sundry deities as are named in this passage, then it is not at all implausible—indeed, it is quite likely—that we are seeing something very similar in the "Sabazios" traditions.

I would also argue that another illustration of the same basic principle could be the equation of the Palestinian figure of Jesus[93] with the Hellenistic figure of Christ,[94] as described by Burton Mack. Behind the various portrayals of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, Mack sees a diverse and complex history of early "Christian" movements, which he breaks down into two basic categories: the "Jesus movements," and the "Christ cults." He tends to use the former to describe those groups that revered Jesus as a sort of founder figure, but either had no tradition of his death or did not attach any special significance to it. The Christ cults, by contrast, seemed to revere the figure of Jesus either as a kind of martyr who died in order to establish their community; or they revered the Christ as a risen saviour figure. While Mack argues, not implausibly, that Jesus was first called Christ at some location in Syria, from a semiotic perspective—and in light of the Sabazios and Isis materials reviewed above—it would seem that a natural implication of his thesis is that, in the first instance, the figure of "Jesus" and the figure of "Christ" were separate from one another. Certainly the abundant and diverse forms of the Jesus movements, not to

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[93] On which see, briefly, Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 53-97.

[94] See Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 98-123.

mention the (slightly later) evidence for many diverse Christ groups, suggests a thriving and variegated set of what we might provisionally call "Jesuanic" and "Christic" traditions that were, at some point, joined together by an act of hermeneutic ingenuity similar to that which joined Sabazios with Yahweh or Dionysus with Osiris. The "Christ Jesus" of the letters of Paul and the "Jesus Christ" of the Synoptic Gospels, then, can be seen as evidence suggesting either that "Jesus" was retroactively confiscated by the Christic traditions or that "Christ" was retroactively confiscated by the Jesuanic traditions.

This fits in well with what we know of Hellenistic religions generally, as the material regarding Dionysus, Sabazios, and Isis reviewed above show. It supports a "polygenetic" theory of the beginnings of early Christianities, far removed from the "monogenetic" presupposition of Christian origins that posits the historical Jesus as the sole originator of Christianity. That is to say, just as it might be more plausible to assume that the Sabazios traditions originated independently of one another—but were eventually confiscated through acts of mutual recognition—than it would be to assume that Sabazios originated in Thrace and then spread throughout the Mediterranean world, so too it might be more plausible to adopt a "polygenetic" understanding of Christian beginnings than to assume that the figure of Jesus originated in Palestine and then spread, with numerous changes and "elaborations," all across the Roman Empire.

I have dwelt on these examples at some length to show that a semiotic theory of religion allows us to break up the "discursive unity"[95] of a given utterance, such as "Jesus Christ," and read it as an act of "confiscation," which has taken up pre-existing

[95] For a full elaboration of this concept, see Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

semiotic material (the "Jesus" or "Christ" tropes) and deployed them in the service of a new interpretation. Mack's thesis of the "progression" from the Jesus movements to the Christ cults continues to allow the Lukan-Eusebian paradigm to set the stage for imagining Christian beginnings, because it still assumes that the first use of the "Christ" label was its application to "Jesus." This is a problematic assumption not only from a theoretical perspective, but also from a comparative perspective. In the light of the Dionysiac traditions alone, it would be problematic to assert that the identification of one figure with another constitutes the originary, "first" use of one of those labels. Surely Dionysus and Orpheus had pre-existing traditions, as did the Zagreus label. Why not assume this for both "Jesus" and "Christ," as well?

In recognition of the fact that a new development in a religious tradition cannot be seen as an "unfolding" from previous developments, I have preferred the terminology of "transformation" or even "confiscation" as opposed to the more dialectical or genetic terminology of "growth" or "progression." This is also why I have taken so much time to ensure that analytically useful periodizations such as "Classical," "Hellenistic," and "Late Antique" neither be ontologized nor be understood on the model of the Hegelian synthesis, as a progression which absorbs and negates the preceding periods. Quite the contrary, "vestigial" remnants of religious beliefs, practices, or institutions that survive from one period to another are not only possible, but are to be expected. This will become important when we turn our attention to the Corinthian Christ association. Before that can be done, however, it is necessary to address the theoretical context in which the comparison of early

Christianities with other Hellenistic religions has often taken place: the scholarly discussion of the "mystery religions." It is to this task that I turn in the next chapter.

2) Mysteries Made Mysterious

> One cannot be too scrupulous, too sincere, too submissive before nature…but one ought to be more or less the master of one's model.
>
> – Cézanne

In this chapter I will examine the scholarship on the relation of early Christianities to the "mystery religions." Though space considerations ensure that I will not be able to perform an exhaustive study of this topic,[96] it is still necessary to address the problems raised by this scholarship in order to augment the theoretical perspective outlined in the last chapter. This is because a semiotic model of Hellenistic religions, with its emphasis on transformations and confiscations, and its effacement of "origins," is a very different model than what has traditionally been employed in this area of scholarship. More often, in the study of "Christianity" and the "mystery religions," the concept of "syncretism," with its implicit assumption that there is such a thing as a "pure" religiosity, has been deployed by a tradition of research that has tried either to protect the "origin" of Christianity from later, "pagan" corruption, or to assert that the "origin" of Christianity is the product of an absolute, syncretistic "borrowing" from these same religions.

This has been demonstrated most clearly in Smith's *Drudgery Divine*, where he shows that the comparison of early Christianities with the religions of Late Antiquity, which began as an apologetic enterprise during the Protestant Reformation, has continued to be an apologetic (and sometimes, an "anti-apologetic") enterprise throughout its 400-year history. As odd as it may seem, one of the primary points of

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[96] Good critical evaluations can be found in Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, as well as in a recent survey of the scholarly literature by Richard Ascough, *What Are They Saying about the Formation of Pauline Churches?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 50-70.

conflict has been the question of whether or not early Christianities should be understood as religions of Late Antiquity. If so, it has often been thought, then Christianity is the "same" as those other religions, and is therefore not "true" or "unique." If not, then Christianity is "different," and is therefore assumed to be "unique," and therefore, "true."[97] The problem with such an enterprise is that it almost amounts to denying that early Christianities emerged during this period, or even that "Christianity" (that is, a specific sense of "Christianity" as a coherent social identity) is not a historical religion at all. My category "Hellenistic religions," by contrast, explicitly includes early Christianities alongside Dionysiac religions, Mithraisms, and so on. In semiotic terms, I see early Christianities as religio-historical "enunciations" alongside other religio-historical "enunciations," thereby envisioning them as interpretations of or responses to the socio-cultural realities of the Hellenistic world.

As stated above, this is *not* the way the study of Christian origins has often operated. Often, accusations of pagan influence and corruption imposed upon a pure, pristine Christianity—accusations of exactly the kind made by Protestant anti-Catholic apologetics during the Protestant Reformation—have set the stage for comparative research on this topic. An unfortunate consequence of this bias, from our present perspective, is that when studying Hellenistic religions, Christian language and Christian categories have been used to describe them, thus encouraging questions of borrowing and influence, and leading to comparative endeavours that pursued value judgments rather than explanatory or cognitive gain.

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[97] Cf. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 36-46.

Perhaps the most stunning example of this is found in the work of Alfred Loisy, who, as Richard Ascough has put it, made "liberal use of terminology that has a specifically Christian resonance to it"[98] in order to argue that Christianity was a "mystery religion." This is illustrated by his description of the initiation rites of the mysteries of Isis and Osiris:

> As Osiris was plunged in the waters of the Nile in order to revive him, so the novice receives a *baptism* whereby he is regenerated. He does not merely see the *death and resurrection* of Osiris in figure; he himself enters into the sacred drama, with a principal part to play; he becomes Osiris.[99]

Even more conspicuous is his description of the rites of Cybele and Attis, in which he claims that Attis's "*passion* and resurrection were duly celebrated" and that, following the rites of anointing with oil, "is found the bloody *baptism* of the taurobole, which was also a *sacrament* of regeneration and of immortality."[100] Considering that Loisy uses Christian terms such as "passion" or "sacrament" to describe the fate of Attis and Osiris, it is no wonder that "when he turns to Paul he finds analogous material and can suggest that Paul's Christianity was 'conceived in its general lines on the same model as those [mystery religions] of which we have just been speaking.'"[101] However, as Ascough points out,

> much of what Loisy describes is not actually present in any of the texts from antiquity. Instead, Loisy has filled in the gaps using language taken from

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[98] Ascough, *Pauline Churches*, 55.

[99] Alfred Loisy, "The Christian Mystery," *The Hibbert Journal* 10 (1911-12), 48, emphasis mine.

[100] Loisy, "The Christian Mystery," 48, emphasis mine.

[101] Ascough, *Pauline Churches*, 55, quoting Loisy, "The Christian Mystery," 50.

> Christianity. Edwyn Bevyn pointedly states, "[o]n this plan, you first put in the Christian elements, and then are staggered to find them there."[102]

A similar point was made by Giulia Sfameni Gasparro in her *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis*.[103] Gasparro begins her monograph by noting, like Smith, that the study of the Hellenistic religious phenomena known as the "mysteries" has often been conducted "with an implicit comparison with the themes and doctrinal contents of Christianity in mind."[104] Noting certain similarities between the religions under study—similarities that were in large part suggested by the fact that Christian language had been used to describe the religions in question—scholars found themselves preoccupied by the question of who borrowed which elements from whom. As Gasparro phrases it, the debate on dependencies:

> led all too often to a simplification of the complex and multiple phenomena gathered in the category of the 'mysteries,' while at the same time precedence was given, within these mysteries, to those aspects or elements which would appear to lend themselves better…to a comparison with Christianity, especially in its Pauline formulation.[105]

The modern concept of the "mystery religions" rose out of this discussion, formed by the postulation of "a series of elements believed to be common to them all." To put the matter over-simply, "in all the attempts to classify the mysteries scholars have

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[102] Ascough, *Pauline Churches*, 56, quoting Bruce Metzger, "Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity," in *Historical and Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish, and Christian* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 9.

[103] Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis* (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain, 103; Leiden: Brill, 1985).

[104] Gasparro, *Cybele and Attis*, xii.

[105] Gasparro, *Cybele and Attis*, xiv.

concentrated essentially on the type of the deity who is the object of the cult, the specific ritual procedure of the cult and the apparent purposes of its celebration."[106] As widespread as this classificatory scheme has been, however, none of these postulated elements withstands critical review.

This is because these three criteria were formulated using Christian terminology, thus forcing the "mystery religions" to conform to a classificatory scheme that held a specific form of "Christianity" as its ideal type. This led some scholars to postulate a general "dying and rising god" pattern that, they argue, was present in all the "mystery religions." For these scholars, the central focus of these religions was the death and resurrection of a saviour god, and cultic participation in this death and resurrection allowed the cult members to attain salvation. This is what Gasparro is referring to when she mentions the focus scholars have given to the "type of the deity" and the "ritual procedure of the cult." It is inextricably related to the third element she points out: the soteriological purposes of the ritual procedure. Once it was assumed that the mystery-deities were all "dying and rising" gods, "the notion of the soteriological efficacy of the god's vicissitude on the initiate who was ritually assimilated in the destiny of the deity through a 'mystic' experience of death and rebirth was fully accepted."[107]

In the history of scholarship, this pattern is in large part derived from the work of James G. Frazer.[108] As Maria G. Lancellotti describes in her recent critical study of

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[106] Gasparro, *Cybele and Attis*, xiv-xv.

[107] Gasparro, *Cybele and Attis*, xv.

[108] Especially James G. Frazer, *Adonis Attis Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1906).

Attis—one of the main figures Frazer identified as a "dying and rising god"—Frazer used the "dying and rising" terminology

> to refer to certain male figures—more or less divine in nature—belonging to the ancient religions of the Mediterranean basin, who were central to a specific and common mythical and ritual tradition, focused on a death event and marked by periodic (seasonal/annual) rhythms. This complex of traditions has been considered—both by Frazer and later by many others—as substantially uniform and has allowed the hypothesis that there existed and spread a sort of pattern [interpreted by Frazer to have had]…the function of representing the extinction of vegetal life and its periodic rebirth in renewed forms.[109]

There are, of course, major problems with this theory, especially its connection to the notions of cyclical, mythic time and the birth and rebirth of vegetation.[110] While J. Z. Smith's arguments against the category remain definitive, [111] the debate on this category's utility has continued, and there have been several recent attempts to defend the category's utility. Hyam Maccoby,[112] for instance, has argued against Smith in an attempt to continue using the concept in relation to Hellenistic deities. I cite his defence of Osiris as a "dying and rising god" as representative of his whole argument:

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[109] Maria Grazia Lancellotti, *Attis between Myth and History: King, Priest, and God* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, 149; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 143.

[110] See John W. Parrish, "It's All in the Definition: The Problem with 'Dying and Rising Gods," *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion* 35 (2006), 71-75.

[111] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Dying and Rising Gods," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. Mircea Eliade; (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 4:521-27.

[112] Hyam Maccoby, *Paul and Hellenism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991).

> While it may be [as Smith argues] that Osiris's death was not seasonal, Frazer's seasonal interpretation of dying-and-rising gods was not always accepted by his school; Jane Harrison usually preferred a rites-of-passage interpretation. This is not a vital matter, as long as some kind of rebirth is postulated. Again, *that 'Osiris did not return to his former mode of existence'* [as Smith argues] *is hardly a material point. This is not part of the definition of a dying-and-rising god.*[113]

What is striking about Maccoby's argument is the equivocation he uses in his attempt to refute Smith and defend the "dying and rising god" category. To sidestep Smith's argument that Osiris did not return to his former mode of life but lived on as lord of the powerful dead by saying it "is hardly a material point" is very weak argumentation. This *was* part of Frazer's definition of a "dying and rising god," and if Maccoby wishes to define the term in some other way, then so be it. Smith's arguments are in any case unimpeached, because they were specifically directed against the *Frazerian* construct of a "dying and rising god." This also invalidates Maccoby's evasion of Smith's arguments against the cyclical, seasonal interpretation of these "dying and rising gods" by saying that many scholars since Frazer have not accepted this formulation. This does not weaken Smith's arguments; if anything, it strengthens them because Maccoby is effectively admitting that Smith is correct in condemning Frazer's nature mythology. Ironically, Maccoby's arguments in defence of the "dying and rising god" category make it very clear that the category is deeply flawed and cannot be used without heavy revision.

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[113] Maccoby, *Paul and Hellenism*, 72, emphasis added.

Another attempt to revive the category is found in Tryggve N. D. Mettinger's *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East.*[114] Beginning with a thorough review of the scholarship on the category, Mettinger then proceeds to take another look at whether gods such as Tammuz/Dumuzi, Baal, or Melqart-Heracles deserve to be termed as "dying and rising" gods. Along the way, he demonstrates that Attis, Adonis, and Osiris should not be classified in this way—a remarkable conclusion, considering that these were the three main figures Frazer used to develop his own theory! Mettinger concludes that there was a general "dying and rising" pattern to be found in the Ancient Near East, even though one should not "hypostasize these gods into a specific type '*the* dying and rising god.'"[115] Again, we see that the "dying and rising god" category cannot be used without revision. Nevertheless, Mettinger still maintains that "the dying and rising gods were closely related to the seasonal cycle" and that "[t]heir death and return were seen as reflected in the changes of plant life. The death and resurrection of Jesus [by contrast] is a one-time event, not repeated, and unrelated to seasonal changes."[116] Mettinger then slips into language very reminiscent of the "scholarly apologetics" that Smith's *Drudgery Divine* dismantled: "the faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus retains its unique character in the history of religions. The riddle remains."[117] This is a perfect example of what Smith terms "the mischievous distinction between 'mythic'—that is to say

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[114] Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East* (Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series, 50; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001).

[115] Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 218.

[116] Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 221.

[117] Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 221.

cyclical, seasonal, 'nature' cults—and 'historical' religions." This distinction has turned out to be "the decisive differentium which has been illegitimately used to separate early Christianity from the 'mystery religions,'"[118] and, in the case of Mettinger, apparently from Ancient Near Eastern religions, as well.

Because I have argued against the cyclical, seasonal interpretation of "dying and rising gods" elsewhere,[119] it is possible, here, to be brief. I will merely recite Walter Burkert's forceful critique of the concept of these figures as personified vegetation spirits. Noting that, in Frazer's view, "[m]yth is produced as an inadequate explanation of nature, and ritual follows myth," Burkert states, in no uncertain terms:

> It is hardly necessary to refute such a construction in detail; the very formulation of "vegetable life personified" betrays its origin: it is in the allegorical writers of late antiquity that Adonis is said to represent 'spring' or 'crops,' and Attis, Osiris, and Persephone are all treated in the same way. Frazer's 'god of vegetation' is post-classic allegory transformed into a genetic theory of religion; we may leave it to [the] rhetoric and poetry from whence it sprang.[120]

As if this were not enough, a further problem with the "dying and rising" pattern is simply that it is "inadequate for the definition of the varied and multiple historical reality of the facts examined."[121] Adonis, for instance, is never said to die in our

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[118] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 128.

[119] Parrish, "It's All in the Definition."

[120] Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 100.

[121] Gasparro, *Cybele and Attis*, xvii.

ancient sources. It seems Mithras died, but apparently he never rose. And Attis, in most versions of his myth, is not even considered a god.[122] Furthermore, in light of recent research, the "dying and rising god" category cannot be applied to Christianity, either, for to assert that the (largely Pauline) notion of "dying and rising with Christ" is the *sine qua non* of "Christianity" ignores the enormous diversity among early Christianities as well.

The use of such a theoretically dubious and descriptively flawed category as that of "dying and rising gods" is methodologically indefensible. The careful attention we must pay to the way in which we approach the problem of comparing early Christianities with other Hellenistic religions is imperative, as underscored by Smith:

> Much will depend on the framing of the issue. The traditional vague terminology of "Early Christianity," "Jewish," "Gentile," "Pagan," "Greco-Oriental," etc. will not suffice. Each of these generic terms denote complex plural phenomena. For purposes of comparison, *they must be disaggregated and each component compared with respect to some larger topic of scholarly interest*. That is to say, with respect to this or that feature, modes of Christianity may differ more significantly between themselves than between some mode of one or another Late Antique religion.[123]

In order to illustrate this methodological perspective, Smith turns his attention to the problem of "soteriology," building upon Gasparro's description of the soteriology of the Attis cult in the first century C.E. and comparing it with a certain type of Christ

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[122] See Smith, "Dying and Rising Gods"; idem, *Drudgery Divine*, 101-107.

[123] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 117-18, emphasis added.

cult, in order to demonstrate that it is possible for these Hellenistic cults to have a richly developed soteriology without a "dying and rising" cult figure.

He compares the Attis and Christ traditions with respect to the theoretical constructs of "locative" and "utopian" worldviews, defining the former as being "concerned primarily with the cosmic and social issues of keeping one's place and reinforcing boundaries. [In 'locative' traditions, t]he vision is one of stability and confidence."[124] The utopian worldview, rather than focus upon *keeping* place, is primarily concerned with *transcending* place. While utopian traditions are characteristically concerned with "salvation" in the sense of rescue from death, the soteriology of a locative tradition has more to do with sanctification. While resurrection language may (but need not) be present in utopian traditions, it is uncharacteristic of locative traditions. In these traditions, "[t]he dead are different and are to be kept distinct from the living; to mix the two would be a disaster…In such locative traditions, what is soteriological is for the dead to remain dead. If beings from the realm of the dead walk among the living, they are the objects of rituals of relocation, not celebration."[125]

While much more could be said regarding the importance of purity regulations and rituals of cleansing, it is enough to note that the presence of anything like a "dying and rising god" would be quite out of place in these traditions. On the other hand, for our purposes the point that should be taken from Gasparro is that a god who

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[124] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 121.

[125] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 123.

dies but still experiences a "positive outcome"[126] would be appropriate to what Smith calls a locative tradition. As Gasparro clearly demonstrates, Attis experiences such a positive outcome. Though there is no resurrection of Attis,

> a form of survival after death is indeed accorded to him; his body does not decay and his hair continues to grow while a finger remains in motion, a sign that Attis is not completely dead. So if we cannot talk of the youth's return to life or 'resurrection,' in mythical tradition…[Attis] has an outcome which, even if it is characterized by *pathos* and by mourning, guarantees a positive prospect for Attis, since he is saved from complete annihilation. In this manner, the youth obtains a subsistence beyond death, or rather what we would be entitled to call a subsistence "in death."[127]

Smith, taking note of this passage, concludes: "Common to each of these interpretations is the notion that it is possible to have a satisfying formulation of a soteriological dimension to the death of a cult figure without invoking the notion of resurrection or 'rising.'"[128]

Turning to "early Christian data comparable to that used by Gasparro to reconstruct the soteriological dimensions of the Attis traditions—iconography, inscriptions, and the like," as opposed to literary data, and "recognizing that this non-literary data becomes identifiably Christian for us only towards the end of the second century (this lack of apparent distinction for the prior period being, in itself, a

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[126] Gasparro, *Cybele and Attis*, xvi.

[127] Gasparro, *Cybele and Attis*, 42.

[128] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 127-28.

significant datum)—an analogous portrait emerges."[129] What we find, if we look at this data, is a number of "relatively small groups, marked off from their neighbors by a rite of [adult baptism], with their most conspicuous cultic act a common meal, and a variety of other activities that would lead a scholar to classify these groups as being highly focused on a cult of the dead."[130]

Just as the non-literary data becomes recognizably Christian only toward the end of the second century, so too the Christian literary data *in the second century* is hardly recognizable *qua* "Christian" literature—if by "Christian" we are referring to Christianity in its Pauline formulation. As reported by André Benoit in his study of this literary corpus:

> One is struck by an especially surprising fact: the baptismal themes of Paulinism are totally absent. Nowhere, in all of the patristic literature of the second century can one perceive the least echo of the mystery according to which to be baptized is to die and be resurrected with Christ…[Paulinism] played no role in the development of baptismal theology in this period.[131]

Literary and non-literary sources, therefore, both show that we are dealing in the main with a very different type of Christianity, in which baptism had no "sacramental" significance, but was rather an initiatory rite. The Pauline formulation of "dying and rising with Christ," once thought to be central not only to "Christianity," but also, in an analogous way, to the mysteries, is now revealed to have been only one form of

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[129] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 128.

[130] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 129-30.

[131] André Benoit, *Le baptême chrétien au deuxième siècle: La théologie des pères* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953), 227; as quoted in Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 112.

Christianity among many, which eventually became orthodox Roman Catholic doctrine. For, it is only around the time of the Constantinian church that Pauline theology achieved its hegemony.[132] As Graydon F. Snyder points out, in his careful study of pre-Constantinian Christian iconography:

> Jesus does not suffer or die in pre-Constantinian art. There is no cross symbol nor any equivalent. Christians did find themselves in difficult circumstances, including death. Yet the symbols show them being delivered from those circumstances, or at peace despite them. Their faith in Jesus Christ [as revealed iconographically] centers on his delivering power. Moreover, their Christology fits more the heroic figure of Mark (without a cross) than the self-giving Christ of the Apostle Paul…From 180 to 400 artistic analogies of self-giving, suffering, sacrifice, or incarnation are totally missing. The suffering Christ on the cross first appeared in the fifth century, and then not very convincingly.[133]

This datum becomes especially significant upon recalling that, in locative traditions, the "vision is one of stability and *confidence*,"[134] for confidence is indeed the word that springs to mind when attempting to describe the soteriology of the pre-

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[132] It is worth remembering that the Pauline corpus was first compiled by the Marcionite "school," and that what we now know as the letters of Paul represent an attempt by certain early Christians to "reclaim" Paul from the "heretical" Marcionites. In light of this—although we have no way of knowing—it may well be that what we now refer to as "the Pauline letters" and "Pauline theology" is very different from the theology of the historical Paul.

[133] Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 56, 165. Snyder's volume was reprinted, with considerable revisions, in 2003, and it is this volume from which I will cite passages not taken directly from Smith's exposition of the 1985 version.

[134] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 121, emphasis added.

Constantinian church as revealed iconographically.[135] Not one of the symbols used in second- and third-century Christian iconography "signifies suffering, death, or self-immolation. All stress victory, peace, and security in the face of adversity. The Jesus iconography follows the same pattern. There is no place in the third century for a crucified Christ, or a symbol of divine death."[136]

If there is no place for depictions of Christ's crucifixion, it seems there is little place for the depiction of his resurrection. A popular motif in the catacombs was the scene of the Resurrection of Lazarus. But even in this case, it seems the motif

> depicts the present reality of resurrection rather than belief in another world…[The early Christians] ate with the dead, talked to them, asked for their assistance…The resurrection motif supports neither a view of otherworldly immortality nor a view of end-time judgment and resurrection. The presence of the dead [within the community] was made possible through the redeeming act of the wonder-worker Jesus. These resurrected dead then were part of the extended Christian family.[137]

Recognizing that there is an inherent bias due to the fact that the archaeological data is largely funereal in nature—though this is no reason to throw out the conclusions drawn—what the "archaeological evidence has been leading to…is the awareness that one of the most central cultic activities of Christians of this era concerns the dead undertaken in an act of eating together with the dead in an extended 'kinship

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[135] See similarly Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 130.

[136] Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 64.

[137] Snyder, *Ante Pacem* 61; as quoted in Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 131.

meal.'"[138] In keeping with the lack of such iconographic representations, these meals with the dead do not refer, recall, or re-enact the sacrifice of Christ. These common meals are not sacraments, but meals of kinship. Rather than being mystical, "[t]he celebration was very social. It strengthened family relationships, either blood or primary, by including extended generations."[139]

All of this evidence, in both the Attis and Christ traditions, bears witness to the soteriology of a locative worldview. "The dead remain dead, in a sphere other than the living; but there is contact, there is continuity of relationship, there is memorialization, there is presence…Above all, both traditions witness to *pistis*, to *fides*, to a sense of confidence."[140] In these early traditions, it seems, there is no indication of a "dying and rising god," nor of the cult member's sacramental participation in this "dying and rising." The use of Pauline theology to provide the normative categories by which the religions of Mediterranean Antiquity should be compared has done much mischief, not only in the "mystery cults," but in the Christ traditions as well.

As we turn to the main topic of our study, the Christ association at Corinth, we should be on the lookout for the assumed normativity of Pauline theology in scholarly descriptions of this group. To guard against this threat, we will have to apply our data, both Christian and non-Christian, to a theoretical grid that will establish parity in our comparisons. I propose to use Smith's descriptions of the religions of "here," "there," and "anywhere," coupled with the constructs of

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[138] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 131.

[139] Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 90.

[140] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 132.

"locative" traditions (or, as Smith would later call them, religions of "sanctification") and "utopian" traditions (or, religions of "salvation") to provide just such a grid.[141] Through comparison, we will attempt to redescribe the Corinthian Christ association and "rectify" our imagination of it through the use of an alternate theory of Christian beginnings. Specifically, it will be argued that, at Corinth, we find an early, first-century Christianity in which there is no place for a "dying and rising god," a sacramental baptism and/or cult meal, or salvation conceived as triumph over death through resurrection. In short, Corinth presents us with an early Christian group in which the three elements once thought to be the most essential to early Christianities as well as to the "mysteries" are not present at all.

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[141] Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 334. It is difficult to understand Smith's efforts to "map" Hellenistic religions according to the tripartite grid of "here, there, and anywhere" as anything other than a rejection of his long-standing terminology of "locative" and "utopian." This is especially the case when one notices him, almost grudgingly, concluding the paper with a discussion of the dual modes of soteriology that occur within these three "spheres" of religion: soteriologies of "sanctification" and "salvation," both of which are exactly the terms by which he has frequently characterized the soteriology of "locative" and "utopian" worldviews, respectively. I feel that this departure is, in fact, quite commendable, and it does seem that the polythetic grid he provides in "Here, There, and Anywhere" is more useful than the binary schema of his earlier works. I have tried to reflect this by referring to religions of "here" and "anywhere" when necessary, though I continue, at present, to use the concept of a "locative" soteriology. In the future, I hope to conduct a study of the theoretical benefits and costs of leaving behind the "locative" and "utopian" terminology completely, replacing them with the grid of "spheres" and "soteriologies," but in this study, I have chosen to preserve the older conceptual apparatus, as there is more of a literary precedent displaying how to "use" these tools. In other words, it's easier for me to "think with" the "locative-utopian" concepts than with the newer terms. There is, alas, a thin line between principle and expediency…

3) "Why then are they baptized?" The Cultural Logic of Baptism for the Dead

> The trick is to find out what the devil they think they are up to.
> — Clifford Geertz[142]

To call 1 Corinthians 15:29 a *crux interpretum* is by now something of a cliché among biblical exegetes.[143] The practice of baptism on behalf of the dead that Paul reports in this verse has proved so baffling that many scholars have thrown up their hands in despair of ever making sense of it. Therefore, to aid our study of this interpretive *crux*, and solve this long-standing mystery, we would do well to heed, from the outset, some words of wisdom from that great detective, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. "As a rule," Holmes insists, "the more bizarre a thing is the less mysterious it proves to be. It is your commonplace, featureless [matters] which are really puzzling, just as a commonplace face is the most difficult to identify."[144] Elsewhere, Holmes elaborates, "[i]t is a mistake to confound strangeness with mystery. The most commonplace [matter] is often the most mysterious, because it presents no new or special features from which deductions may be drawn."[145] Holmes therefore warns against neglecting "those *outré* and sensational accompaniments which [render a

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[142] Clifford Geertz, "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," *Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 58. I thank Willi Braun for bringing this quote to my attention.

[143] Many scholars have referred to this verse in this way. I merely cite two examples: Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead* (trans. H. J. Stenning; New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1933), 172; Bernard M. Foschini, *"Those Who Are Baptized for the Dead" I Cor. 15:29: An Exegetical Historical Dissertation* (Worcester, MA: Heffernan, 1951), 1.

[144] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Red-Headed League," in *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories* (New York: Bantam, 1986), vol. 1, 276.

[145] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Study in Scarlet," in *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories* (New York: Bantam, 1986), vol.1, 60.

case] remarkable. These strange details, far from making [a case] more difficult, [often have] the effect of making it less so."[146]

These methodological precepts are *apropos* the issue that concerns us here, for all too often the attempt to explain Corinthian baptism for the dead has been hindered from the outset by poor efforts at categorization. As Richard DeMaris has observed in a recent study of 1 Corinthians 15:29, the work of previous scholars who studied the practice, such as Wayne Meeks and Rudolf Schnackenburg, was conceptually flawed, which blocked their attempt at understanding the practice of baptism for the dead. For instance, "Schnackenburg relegated 1 Corinthians 15:29 to a chapter called 'Uncertain and Derived Baptismal Statements'…[while] Meeks assigned it to unknown and controverted rituals instead of including it in his treatment of baptism."[147] Thus, the very way in which the study was conducted ensured that nothing of use could be learned.

Recalling the words of Sherlock Holmes, we might say that these two scholars confused strangeness with mystery, and therefore failed to make use of the *outré*, sensational, and special features that could have allowed them to make useful deductions regarding the practice. Relegating baptism on behalf of the dead into a unique category quite predictably occluded these scholars' attempts to understand the practice. DeMaris seems to concur with the general sense of Holmes' warning when

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[146] Doyle, "A Study in Scarlet," 60.

[147] Richard E. DeMaris, "Funerals and Baptisms, Ordinary and Otherwise: Ritual Criticism and Corinthian Rites," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 29 (1999), 26.

he states that "[i]solating baptism for the dead, as Meeks [and Schnackenburg] did, rendered it mystifying to [them]…but placing it in context has the opposite effect."[148]

It is the "de-mystifying" effect of placing a datum within context that makes the enterprise of comparison so useful here. I have been influenced by Smith's understanding of the comparative method as providing the scholar with the occasion for surprise by casting data in a new light, as well as providing the tools by which the scholar can overcome his or her surprise through processes of translation and explanation. Smith describes this as an enterprise of "redescription," a term which he understands to refer "neither [to] a procedure of substitution nor of synonomy; [rather] it is the result of comparison across difference, taking cognitive advantage of the resultant mutual distortion."[149] Often, Smith has written that "redescription" is a kind of translation, defined as "the proposal that the second-order language of one domain (the unknown/the unfamiliar) may translate the second-order language appropriate to another domain (the known)."[150] The consequence—indeed, the advantage—of this procedure is that there will always be *discrepancy* between the data and our model. As Smith informs us, "the cognitive power of any translation, model, map, or redescription…is…a result of its difference from the phenomena in question and not its congruence…[F]or this reason, a paraphrase, perhaps the commonest sort of weak translation in the human sciences…will usually be

[148] DeMaris, "Funerals and Baptisms," 28.

[149] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Re: Corinthians," in *Relating Religion*, 346.

[150] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Bible and Religion," in *Relating Religion*, 208.

insufficiently different for purposes of thought. To summarize: a theory, a model, a conceptual category, *cannot be simply the data writ large.*"[151]

With all this in mind, I will begin with a review of DeMaris' work on Demeter devotion in first century Corinth, after which I will situate (the scholarly construction of) the Corinthian Christ group within first century Corinth as DeMaris describes it. I will then move toward a discussion of baptism on behalf of the dead. This will entail a discussion of Greek attitudes toward death and the dead, as well as a description of analogous practices within the field of Hellenistic religions generally. Examining 1 Cor 15:29 in light of this data allows me robustly to theorize and redescribe the practice of baptism on behalf of the dead, which in turn leads to a rather radical shift in the way the Corinthian Christ group is imagined. Further situating our construct among the source texts allows me to redescribe many of the Corinthian practices evinced to us by Paul's letter, eventually allowing me to redescribe the group with respect to Jonathan Z. Smith's construct of a "locative" religious tradition. This provides a powerful grid by which I will attempt to redescribe the Corinthian Christ association as a group highly focused upon a cult of the dead, whose myths and practices display a culturally relevant and socially efficacious response to the general context of first century Corinth. Finally, I will attempt to situate my redescribed Christ group within the larger context of early Christianities.

Baptism for the Dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29

[151] Smith, "Bible and Religion," 208-209.

Looking at 1 Cor 15:29, one is struck by the brevity of Paul's reference to baptism on behalf of the dead. The text does not give us much to go on, and we would gladly know more about this very interesting ethnographic "marker." Paul merely mentions this practice in passing, referring to a ritual that is common knowledge both to him and the Corinthians but otherwise unknown to us in first-century Christianity. Paul says:

> Ἐπει τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτιζέμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν; εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, τί καὶ ὑπερ αὐτων;
>
> Otherwise what will they do, the ones being baptized on behalf of the dead? If dead persons really are not raised, why indeed are they [the living] baptized on behalf of them? (1 Cor 15:29)

Even a cursory glance at the mountain of scholarship dedicated to this verse[152] will show that, as in the case of Meeks and Schnackenburg, the way in which the subject is approached has often precluded any attempt to understand the practice. It is not unusual to see the topic approached apologetically (in both senses of the term: defensive *apologia* as well as embarrassed apology), in order either to portray the practice as a "corruption" of Paul's teaching, or to offer an embarrassed interpretation of the verse which demonstrates that the practice is not really what it sounds like. An example of this last would be the argument of R. A. Campbell,[153] who claims that 1 Cor 15:29 refers merely to normal Christian baptism, and that Paul is really asking why the resurrection-deniers are being baptized for (their own) dead bodies: if indeed

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[152] Richard E. DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:29): Insights from Archaeology and Anthropology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995), 661-82, provides a good preliminary bibliography. See also Adam C. English, "Mediated, Mediation, Unmediated: 1 Corinthians 15:29: the History of Interpretation, and the Current State of Biblical Studies," *Review and Expositor* 99 (2002), 419-28, for an historical overview of interpretations of the verse.

[153] R. A. Campbell, "Baptism and Resurrection (1 Cor 15:29)," *Australian Biblical Review* 47 (1999), 43-52.

the dead are not raised, then what good is baptism to a dead body? Another illustration would be the interpretation of J. R. White,[154] who argues, in light of the "danger" Paul claims he has put himself in (1 Cor 15:30), and the fact that he says he "dies" every day (1 Cor 15:31), that we should understand "the dead" mentioned in 15:29 to be a symbolic reference to Paul.

However, the majority of scholars now understand 1 Cor 15:29 to refer to the practice of vicarious baptism for the dead.[155] Perhaps the most intriguing recent work that has been done on the verse is that of Richard DeMaris, who examines archaeological evidence of first-century Corinth and, finding it to be a city with a remarkable preoccupation with the Underworld, suggests in light of this that the Corinthian Christians may have been trying to secure for their unbaptized dead a happy place in the afterlife. What is most intriguing about DeMaris' proposal is that, in contrast to most other interpreters, he has conducted his work by first examining the social context in which the Corinthian Christian practice of baptism on behalf of the dead arose, and then offering a plausible interpretation of the practice in light of that context. This is in keeping with our semiotic theory of religion, which highlights the addressivity of all acts of enunciation, conceiving them as a "dialogue" of sorts, in which enunciative responses are made to present social and cultural conditions. Thus, by beginning with an examination of the social realities in which a given cultural practice occurs, one is in a more advantageous position to see the "logic" of that practice. When described in such a way, the practice no longer appears as an

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[154] Joel R. White, "'Baptized on Account of the Dead': The Meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:29 in its Context," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 (1997), 487-99.

[155] See DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," 662 n. 5; cf. English, "Mediated, Mediation, Unmediated," 423 n. 16, for a review of scholarship.

"anomaly," but as a culturally-patterned response that "makes sense" given its contemporary conditions.

Another strength of DeMaris' work is that he argues for an interpretive model that takes into account the regional variations present within Hellenistic religious traditions, which he illustrates by quoting Nancy Bookidis' recent observation that "an increasing awareness of regional variations in ancient religion…[has] made the generalizations of the past somewhat suspect,"[156] and that this suspicion "may necessitate qualifying general claims made about Greco-Roman religions, including ancient Christianity."[157] This acknowledgement of local and chronological variation can only be applauded as a major theoretical and methodological advance.[158]

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[156] Quoted in DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," 663; cf. Richard E. DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth: Local Development in a Mediterranean Religion," *Numen* 42 (1995), 106. I assume it is this suspicion about "the generalizations of the past" that Robert M. Price is chafing against in his review of Jonathan Z. Smith's *Drudgery Divine*, which appeared in the *Journal of Higher Criticism* 2/1 (1996), 137-45. Price notes "a certain contagious squeamishness now making the rounds among scholars. Apparently embarrassed by the bold synthetic visions of Reitzenstein, Bultmann, and others, contemporary scholars are beginning to practice a kind of theoretic asceticism, daring to move nary an inch beyond the strictest interpretation of the evidence." Price claims that this "modesty leads to a mute minimalism." He criticizes the "the spare and generic taxonomy" of many scholarly discussions of the mysteries today by comparing them to Samuel Angus' bold vision of a system of Mystery Religions which "offered redemption and purification from sin through sacramental identification of the initiate with the savior deity, elite gnosis of the gods, cosmological/astrological lore, the promise of rebirth and immortality, and participation in a syncretic Hellenistic pantheism or henotheism," before finally stating that he "senses here a certain fastidious *angst*, a hesitancy to make any but the most innocuous generalizations about the Mystery Religions lest one be accused of painting with too broad a stroke, as some accuse Reitzenstein of doing." While I am not opposed to Price's call for bold and rich theorizing *per se*, I do wish to point out that he seems blatantly to ignore the enormous problems identified with the "bold synthetic visions" of Angus and Reitzenstein (to say nothing of Loisy, Lake, Bousset, et al.). The methodological and theoretical failings of these works deserve critique, and scholarly work will not have been advanced if we are unable to critique the scholars of an earlier generation without being accused by scholars such as Price, of harboring apologetic biases or suffering from "a certain fastidious *angst*."

[157] DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," 663.

[158] Despite this advance, I still look slightly askance at DeMaris' claim that his approach "does not intend to deny the creative energies working within early Christian communities," and that for this reason he does not "take lightly the conclusions of scholars [such as A.D. Nock] who see nothing in the Greco-Roman environment that would have given rise to or shaped Christian baptism" ("Corinthian Religion," 662-63). I suspect that DeMaris is trying to distance himself from the older questions of "borrowing" from one religion to another that often accompany the search for "parallels"

Corinth: The Setting

To set the stage for gaining a new understanding of Corinthian baptism for the dead in its social context, we now turn to a brief review of DeMaris' article on Demeter devotion in Roman Corinth. Writing about the differences in Demeter devotion in the Greek and Roman periods, DeMaris observes that "Demeter of Corinth suffered a very different fate from Demeter of Eleusis: in contrast to the continuity [to be found]...between the Eleusinian mysteries of the Greek and Roman periods, the Greek and Roman phases of Demeter devotion at Corinth differed."[159] DeMaris suggests that part of this difference may be accounted for by the very different treatment Rome gave to Eleusis and Corinth, but he also says that this is not sufficient to account for all the differences. Demeter devotion survived in Corinth even after the sack of the city by the Roman general Mummius in 146 BCE, and lasted through the foundation of the Roman colony by Julius Caesar, around which time it dwindled to almost nothing.[160] But "worship must have revived significantly by the mid-first century CE, for a major rebuilding of the sanctuary took place in the second half of

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between early Christianities and the mystery religions, and I respect this caution. However, this does not mean we should dismiss the enterprise of comparison entirely. If, as Smith suggests, we are to move our comparisons away from attempts to demonstrate genealogical dependencies and toward an understanding of comparison as an artificial analogical process intended to produce some cognitive gain, then we will have to reconsider the question of whether the activities of the Corinthian Christ association, such as their distinctive practice of baptism for the dead, have any analogies in the Hellenistic world which can increase our understanding of this group.
Despite this minor flaw, however, DeMaris' work is still among the most interesting work done on 1 Cor 15:29—and on Roman Corinth, generally—in recent years.

[159] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 106-107.

[160] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 107.

that century,"[161] after which it thrived until the late fourth century. The history of the worship of Demeter and Kore-Persephone at Corinth is a history of "relative continuity and steady popularity *even in the face of* overwhelming military and thus economic and political disruption."[162]

The difference between the Greek and Roman periods of Corinthian Demeter devotion, then, cannot be described "in terms of waxing and waning popularity but in terms of the cult's religious orientation."[163] The archaeological record reveals a pronounced change in the architecture of the Demeter sanctuary on Acrocorinth, as well as a shift in the type of material remains. The finds dated to the Roman period display a noticeable shift: from a layer of pottery remains that have an obviously cultic, perhaps votive, function, to a layer containing a remarkable number of curse tablets (*defixiones*), which are "concentrated at levels dating to an early phase of Roman occupation, probably late first or early second century."[164] This material shift indicates that the Demeter of Roman Corinth was not primarily revered as the Eleusinian provider of fruit, grains, and fertility, but invoked and worshiped because of her underworld aspect. This chthonic emphasis is suggested by the fact that curse tablets were directed almost exclusively to Underworld figures or deities,[165] as well as by the frequent depiction of snakes in mosaics and pottery decorations, as revealed

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[161] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 107.

[162] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 107, emphasis original.

[163] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 107.

[164] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 108.

[165] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 108. Cf. Sarah Iles Johnston, *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 91-92: "[M]essages on…curse tablets…are usually directed to Underworld deities such as Hecate and Hermes, who are expected to rouse dead souls into action."

by finds in and around the sanctuary. The snake's "funerary and underworld affinities in Greco-Roman religion"[166] are further evidence that Demeter devotion in this period had a chthonic emphasis.

A very strong indication of the Demeter cult's underworld aspect in the region of the Corinthia is found in nearby Isthmia, where an inscription dedicated to Licinius Priscus Juventianus mentions the refurbishing of temples in a certain sacred grove in the city, including the temples of Demeter and Kore-Persephone, and it also "mentions construction of a Plutoneion, a sanctuary to Pluto, god of the underworld."[167] As "[w]orship of Pluto and sites dedicated to him are exceedingly rare in the Greek world," to uncover "evidence of such in the same precinct as the center for Demeter and Kore worship at Roman Isthmia suggests the underworld orientation of Demeter devotion there."[168]

Furthermore, ceramic finds at Roman Isthmia also suggest the chthonic emphasis of Demeter worship there. DeMaris refers to excavations done in 1954, which uncovered two vases west of the temple of Poseidon. Both of these vases displayed a large snake appliqué, which, DeMaris argues, "points to an underworld or funerary aspect." He connects these vases to Demeter by way of the "several pottery fragments with snake appliqué recovered at the Demeter and Kore sanctuary in Corinth."[169] By way of this evidence, he argues that "snake appliqué in the Corinthia

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[166] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 108.

[167] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 109.

[168] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 109.

[169] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 109.

signals not just a chthonic aspect in general; its tie to the Demeter sanctuary confirms the underworld orientation of that specific cult."[170]

In light of this, DeMaris suggests two factors, in addition to the different treatment given to Eleusis and Corinth by Rome, which could account for the change in the orientation of Demeter devotion whereby "the earlier Greek emphasis on fertility gave way to funerary and underworld emphases" in the Roman period.[171] First, he suggests we take into account the influx of Roman colonists in the first-century BCE. There seems to be a consensus among current scholars "that the colonists that founded and built Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis were mostly former slaves sent as agents of Rome's ruling elite to establish Corinth as a major commercial and transshipment center for the empire."[172] In light of this scholarship, it is possible that "the agricultural and fertility aspects of Demeter devotion did not receive the attention they might have if Rome had sent colonists primarily to exploit the rich soil of the Corinthian plain."[173] Second, it is possible that mixed burial practices might have led to an added focus on funerary concerns. If "a residual Greek population inhuming their dead and Roman colonists cremating their dead were using the [same] cemetery," this may have served to "draw attention to the dead and thus to the underworld, so that local Demeter worship came to emphasize the chthonic."[174]

It does not seem to me that the transformation of devotion to Demeter in Roman Corinth is best described as a radical departure from the earlier Greek

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[170] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 109.

[171] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 111.

[172] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 113; see 117 n. 37 for the bibliographical references.

[173] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 111.

[174] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 113-14.

emphasis on fertility, but might more profitably be imagined as a change in emphasis within the tradition—in other words, as a case study in the dynamics of religious persistence and change.[175] At Eleusis, both the agricultural and fertility aspects as well as the underworld and funerary aspects were present in the tradition of Demeter worship even in Greek times. It seems the transformation we witness at Corinth is, in fact, a reinterpretation of earlier traditions, which changed the emphasis of the Demeter cult in response to different social pressures. The influx of recent immigrants, concerned about their ancestors left behind in the homeland, and the co-mingling of burial practices such a recent influx would entail, would seem to constitute a good starting point for explaining this preoccupation.

More important for our topic, the remarkable underworld preoccupation found in first-century CE Corinth might also cast light on the early Christian practice of baptism for the dead documented in 1 Cor 15:29. This implication is certainly not lost on DeMaris, as both the conclusion of his article on Demeter devotion and his entire article on Corinthian baptism on behalf of the dead are meditations on this point. It would certainly make sense, if concern for the dead and the world of the dead was a widespread concern in Corinth during this time, that the Corinthian Christian practice could be seen as one instance of experimentation that takes up an earlier practice in a critical and imaginative fashion, and re-interprets it to meet a widespread, culturally-patterned need. In this respect, both the Corinthian practice of baptism for the dead and the shift to an underworld emphasis in the Corinthian Demeter cult can both be seen as reflexive adaptations to changing social and cultural conditions. As I will show, this redescription of the practice described in 1 Cor 15:29 implies a radical re-

[175] See above, p. 27f., for my thoughts on this dynamic.

visioning of the situation of the Corinthian Christ group. For now, though, I will turn to a discussion of the dead in the cultural imagination of the ancient Greeks, and begin to search for analogies with which to compare, and then to clarify, Corinthian Christian baptism on behalf of the dead.

The Dead Get Restless: Greek Attitudes Toward the Dead

By far one of the best resources for understanding the changing places occupied by the dead in the cultural imagination of ancient Greece is Sarah Iles Johnston's *Restless Dead.* By reading literary sources for beliefs about the dead during the Homeric and Classical periods, she is able to discern a gradual change in attitude toward death and the dead. Her reading begins with the evidence found in the Odyssey, where the dead are mostly incapable of interaction with the living except in specific, ritually induced circumstances.[176] This is because the barrier between the realm of the dead and the realm of the living is thought to be impermeable, except under certain conditions and in specific locations, where the "edge" of the upper world meets the realm of the dead. This reflects the ancient cosmology, which holds that the universe is structured in three stories, and that there are certain places, ordained by the gods, where one level of the cosmos can be reached from another level. Only at places such as these is interaction between the living and the dead thought to be possible.[177] For this reason, the few dead that do interact with the living tend to be those who have not received a proper burial, since the souls of the dead

[176] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 7-8.

[177] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 8-9.

cannot be admitted to the Underworld until they have received these rites. As Anticleia tells Odysseus, there is a river that separates the world of the living from the world of the dead, and the dead who are prevented from crossing the river often return to haunt the living (*Odyssey* 11.155-159). In addition to the unburied dead, those who died young, unmarried, or childless were also thought to pose a threat.[178] There is a simple logic to this: since death is thought to be the final stage of life, and since one cannot move on to the next stage of life before the previous one has been completed, those who have died before completing the prerequisite stages are thought to be anomalous, abnormal, and therefore dangerous. Like the unburied dead, these abnormal dead linger between the two worlds and are barred from entering the Underworld, making them a potential threat to the living.

During this period, the "life" of the dead in the Underworld was thought to be a gloomy, even boring, existence. With a very few exceptions, the fate of the dead was undifferentiated, meaning that both good and evil souls received the same fate. "Special" fates were meted out to the "special" dead (e.g., heroes such as Menelaus, or figures such as Sisyphus and Prometheus). But for the most part, there was no concept of punishment or reward in the afterlife for one's conduct in earthly life—indeed, there was no concept of the dead continuing to exist as individuals at all.[179] Rather, the dead were thought to comprise an abstract, collective "whole."

There is evidence for a shift from this perspective in chapter 24 of the *Odyssey*—a chapter which is generally considered to have been written later than the

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[178] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 9-10.

[179] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 11-14.

rest of the *Odyssey*.[180] Here we find, for the first time, evidence for a belief that death is a difficult transition; so difficult, in fact, that the dead require a guide to the Underworld—a *psychopompos*. "Other Homeric descriptions of passages to the Underworld portray souls as simply flying away from their bodies, suggesting that in the view of this poet, transition to death was swift and simple, requiring no divine aid."[181] By contrast, the notions of the journey's difficulty and the need for a *psychopompos* shows that the Greeks were beginning to imagine death as a long and difficult *process*, rather than an instantaneous transition.

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (7th cent. B.C.E.), another important source, "demonstrate[s] that the boundary between the upper world and the Underworld was [beginning to be imagined as] permeable [during this period]; if Persephone could pass back and forth, perhaps others could as well."[182] Not only noteworthy because it questions the impermeability of the boundary between the land of the living and the land of the dead, this source "is also important because it introduces the idea that all individuals will be punished or rewarded after death for their behavior during life."[183] This text is one of the earliest to suggest "that by undertaking special rites while alive, anyone might win postmortem rewards—perhaps even an afterlife that included

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[180] Johnston (*Restless Dead*, 14 n. 29) refers to Christiane Sorvinou-Inwood, *"Reading" Greek Death to the End of the Classical Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 94-103, as a good summary of arguments for a later date of *Odyssey* 24, with further bibliography at p. 94 n. 239.

[181] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 15.

[182] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 18.

[183] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 18.

sunlight, feasting, and beautiful surroundings, similar to the paradisical existence promised to heroes in earlier works,"[184] as these lines show:

> ὄλβιος ὸς τάδ' ὄπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρωπων· ὅς δ' ἀτελὴς ἱερῶν, ὅς τ' ἄμμοπος, οὔ ποθ' ὁμίων αἶσαν ἔχει φθίμενός περ ὑπὸ ζόφῳ εὐρώεντι.
>
> Blessed is he of earth-bound men who has seen these things, but he who dies uninitiated in the sacred things, he who has no part in them, never has a claim on such good things, down in the land of darkness and death (*Hom. h. Cer.*, 480-82).

This innovation introduced "not only the possibility of a better afterlife but the necessity of worrying about one's afterlife while still alive and of wondering about the condition of other people who had died. Death and the dead became objects of greater concern precisely because variation had been introduced."[185]

One final note: in the poetry of Empedocles (fragment 101), we see him boast that he can teach students how to bring souls out of Hades. Johnston brings out the significance of this boast when she remarks, "Empedocles' poem is one of the earliest mentions we have of the very important idea that the dead were not only capable of returning on their own but could be made to return by actions performed by the living."[186] For our purposes, what should be taken from this discussion is Johnston's overarching hypothesis that "Greek beliefs evolved from a system in which the dead were relatively weak and unlikely to affect the world of the living, except under very

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[184] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 18; see 18 n. 48 for further references, both primary and secondary.

[185] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 18-19. Though not directly related to our theme, it is worth noting that this development in the late archaic age coincides with the development of the idea of metempsychosis. What is significant for our purposes is that the notion of metempsychosis, "like belief in a system of postmortem rewards and punishments, assumes an expectation that souls will be treated as individuals after death, and it therefore also indicates…that we have moved quite a bit away from the Homeric picture of an afterlife in which all are treated equally" (19).

[186] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 19-20; see 19 n. 52 for further references.

specific circumstances and then of their own volition, into a system in which the dead were an active force and could be called into action when the living chose."[187]

The Needy Dead

As we begin to move from this "background" information (or, to be more generous, from this "discussion of context"[188]) toward an attempt to find analogies for the Corinthian practice of baptism for the dead, it is necessary to discuss the motivations that might have driven people to perform rites on behalf of the dead during the Greco-Roman period. Despite the modern, "scientific" worldview sometimes claimed to dominate the "Western mind," one must suspend judgment as to the "rationality" or "irrationality" of ancestor reverence. I emphasize this as a corrective to the disparaging descriptions of the practice by such scholars as Mary Walbank, who recently wrote that "[p]ouring food and drink onto the bones of the dead in the expectation of nourishing the spirit was a common, *albeit illogical*, practice in the ancient world."[189] By contrast, my own view of the motivations behind ancestral reverence in the Hellenistic world aligns closely with that of Johnston,[190] who says these rites might be done out of affection for the deceased, but also out of "fear that

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[187] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 31.

[188] This phrase is an acknowledgement of the influence Jonathan Z. Smith has had upon my thinking. I am referring, specifically to a line in his essay, "The Temple and Magician," in *Map Is Not Territory*, 172, which studies the second century autobiography of Thessalos the magician. In honor of Nils A. Dahl, Smith remarks that such non-Christian texts as these should not be treated as mere "background" to early Christianities "but as a *document humain*."

[189] Mary E. Hoskins Walbank, "Unquiet Graves: Burial Practices of the Roman Corinthians," in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (ed. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 257, emphasis added.

[190] See Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 38 n. 1, for a statement of her own influences.

they [the dead] would cause harm if not appeased."[191] It should be noted that these two options are not mutually exclusive, and that there is in fact very little difference between rites of affection and rites of appeasement. The happy dead can become dangerous at any time, and the dead who would bring aid and benefits to the living in exchange for care and reverence are the same dead who would cause harm to the living in retaliation for neglect. Thus it is clear that the dead were imagined to be volatile, dangerous, and very much "alive." The "lack of any real *qualitative* difference between the angry dead and the peaceful dead—and thus the potential for the latter to become the former—is reflected by the fact that actions performed to soothe the angry dead are often the same as those used to honor the peaceful."[192] I would therefore argue, *pace* Walkbank, that within the cultural order of the Greeks, the practice of feeding the dead was a perfectly *logical* practice. In other words, it could be said that the notions of *do ut des* and *do ut abeas* were present in every action performed in relation to the dead.[193]

This last point is made in opposition to DeMaris' rather limited description of the practice in his article "Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead." DeMaris notes that the general Greco-Roman context of Corinthian baptism for the dead amounts to "a culture in which aiding the dead was all important and which assumed that the world of the living could affect the world of the dead."[194] Elsewhere,

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[191] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 38.

[192] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 38-39.

[193] See the brief but tantalizing discussion by Samuel Angus, *The Mystery-Religions and Christianity* (London: Hazell, Watson, & Viney, 1928), 173-74, which links the "chthonic" cults of the dead with the emergence of the mystery cults. Cf. Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 105-11.

[194] DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," 674.

DeMaris makes similar statements to the effect that the living might have performed these rights on behalf of the dead out of honor or affection for the deceased community member, but nowhere does he mention the simultaneous fear of the dead in the cultural imagination of this period. Noting that Greco-Romans tended to think of dying as a long transition or journey (a metaphor that goes back at least to the Odyssey, chapter 24, as our review of Johnston has shown), DeMaris goes on to say that, during the long process of death,

> the deceased is thought to be precariously positioned between two worlds, the living and the dead. Living society must, therefore, exert itself to help the deceased pass through the transition, so that the uncertain status that dying imposes on the deceased can be resolved.[195]

While this description is undoubtedly accurate, there is more to be said. It would be a mistake to neglect the fear of the havoc the dead could cause, and indeed *would* cause, if they were left unburied and not properly attended to. Rituals that would help the dead cross over into the land of the dead would not only ease their suffering, but might also be imagined to ameliorate the potential harm that the dead could cause. DeMaris' neglect of this aspect reflects a more general neglect in scholarly literature, highlighted by Johnston, who suspects "that this neglect is due to a deep-rooted reluctance to accept the idea that the Greeks believed in the possibility of anything so 'irrational' as interaction between the living and the dead."[196] While this reluctance need not apply specifically to DeMaris, it is not unlikely that the bias of an earlier generation could all too easily be inherited by even the most critical of scholars. We

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[195] DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," 675.

[196] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, ix-x.

will have to keep these cautions in mind as we turn to the search for analogies to the Corinthian practice of baptism for the dead in the wider context of Greco-Roman religion.

Searching for Analogies

I have already alluded to the vast body of literature that focuses on the relation of early Christianities to the mystery cults. It is in this literature that we would expect to find useful analogies between Christian and "pagan" baptism for the dead. Surprisingly, however, mentions of the practice are comparatively rare. When baptism is discussed at all, it is usually discussed in its Pauline formulation, where it is described as a "sacrament" which allows participation in the death and resurrection of the savior god Christ. Where baptism is discussed in the context of the mystery religions, it is far too often described using (Pauline) Christian terminology, thus *creating* a "parallel" between Christianity and the mysteries on the basis of scholarly language alone.

To my knowledge, the earliest specific reference to 1 Cor 15:29 in this literature was made by F. M. Rendtorff, in his *Die Taufe im Urchristentum im Lichte der neueren Forschungen.*[197] Regrettably, Rendtorff's discussion is quite brief. He states he takes it for granted that the practice of baptism on behalf of the dead came from the Mysteries, and cites the "Orphic" passage in Plato, *The Republic, ii.*364, as his evidence. Some years later, H.A.A. Kennedy, in his *St. Paul and the Mystery*

[197] F. M. Rendtorff, *Die Taufe im Urchristentum im Lichte der neueren Forschungen* (Leipsig: Hinrichs, 1905), 33.

Religions, dismissed the parallel cited by Rendtorff as "far from convincing,"[198] but he offered no serious counter-proposal. In fact, Kennedy's discussion of this verse is uninformative, and also "far from convincing." Like many commentators since him, he treated the practice of baptism on behalf of the dead as a strange and baffling practice, and suggested that Paul's "curious reference" to baptism on behalf of the dead refers to a practice that "must undoubtedly have existed in certain [early Christian] communities."[199] Kennedy concludes: "No clear analogies have been detected in the Mystery-cults, though it is quite probable that it had its origin in these."[200]

A more useful reference is Thomas Wilson's *St. Paul and Paganism*.[201] During a discussion of the Eleusinian Mysteries, Wilson explains that the initiates bathed in sea water in order to cleanse themselves from sin (hence, ἁλαδε μύσται, "initiates to the sea")[202] and then "took part in a severe trial of their courage. Wandering through gloomy passages, and overcoming serious obstacles, before they finally emerged into the open air in a blaze of light. *The purpose of this latter ceremony was to show them the miseries of the uninitiated dead, and it may be*

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[198] H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul and the Mystery-Religions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), 253 n. 2.

[199] Kennedy, *St. Paul and the Mystery-Religions*, 253.

[200] Kennedy, *St. Paul and the Mystery-Religions*, 253. While I agree with Kennedy that the parallel cited by Rendtorff is "far from convincing" if one meaps to establish a genetic connection, I use this passage from the *Republic* to elucidate the logic of the practice of baptism on behalf of the dead. In this regard, I think the passage is very informative.

[201] Thomas Wilson, *St. Paul and Paganism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1927).

[202] Wilson, *St. Paul and Paganism*, 174 n. 3.

compared with the baptism for the dead mentioned by St. Paul."[203] As a *comparandum*, Wilson suggests[204] a passage from Plato's *Republic* (*ii*.364b5-365a3), which I cite here in full:

> And mendicant prophets go to rich men's doors and persuade them that they have a power committed to them by the gods of making an atonement for a man's own or his ancestor's [προγόνων] sins [ἀδίκημα] by sacrifices or charms, with rejoicings and feasts; and they promise to harm an enemy, whether just or unjust, at a small cost; with magic arts and incantations binding heaven, as they say, to execute their will. And the poets are the authorities to whom they appeal, now smoothing the path of vice with the words of Hesiod:
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> *Vice may be had in abundance without trouble; the way is smooth and her dwelling-place is near. But before virtue the gods have set toil,*
>
> and a tedious and uphill road: then citing Homer as a witness that the gods may be influenced by men; for he also says:
>
> *The gods, too, may be turned from their purpose; and men pray to them and avert their wrath by sacrifices and soothing entreaties, and by libations and the odour of fat, when they have sinned and transgressed.*
>
> And they produce a host of books written by Musaeus and Orpheus, who were children of the Moon and the Muses—that is what they say—according to which they perform their ritual, and persuade not only individuals, but whole cities, that expiations [λύσεις] and atonements [καθαρμοὶ] for sin

[203] Wilson, *St. Paul and Paganism*, 174, emphasis added.

[204] Wilson, *St. Paul and Paganism*, 174 n. 4.

> [αδικημάτων] may be made by sacrifices and amusements which fill a vacant hour, and are equally at the service of the living and the dead [τελευτήσασιν]; the latter sort they call mysteries [τελετὰς], and they redeem [ἀπολύουσιν] us from the pains of hell [ἐκεῖ κακῶν], but if we neglect them no one knows what awaits us.[205]

While there is indeed much in this passage that invites comparison with 1 Cor 15:29, first we should note, as Günter Wagner has done, that the passage cited by Wilson "has no bearing upon Eleusis."[206] The passage makes quite clear that these mendicant prophets have learned their mysteries from Orpheus and Musaeus, and have nothing to do with the Eleusinian Mysteries. However, Wilson's factual error does not invalidate the comparison he invites. If anything, it *extends* the comparative field—Wilson has, inadvertently, provided us with not one but *two* useful pieces of data which can shed light on the Corinthian Christian practice of baptism for the dead: the *teletai* performed on behalf of the dead mentioned in Plato's *Republic*, and the belief in the miseries of the uninitiated dead that we learn about from Eleusis. We will review each of these in turn below.

First I will examine the passage from Plato's *Republic*. As noted, Plato refers to "mendicant prophets" who "knock on rich men's doors" and promise that they can, for a price, use sacrifices and charms to help a client atone for his or her transgressions (ἀδικήματα), and can even perform rites to expiate transgressions

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[205] I am citing a translation of the *Republic* of Benjamin Jowett, which is available online at http://www.constitution.org/pla/republic.htm.

[206] Günter Wagner, *Pauline Baptism and The Pagan Mysteries: The Problem of the Pauline Doctrine of Baptism in Light of Its Religio-Historical 'Parallels'* (trans. J. P. Smith; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1967), 73 n. 26.

committed by their ancestors (πρόγονοι). These ancestors seem to have received an unfortunate fate because of their own actions while alive. While there is no explicit mention of baptism, it is significant for our topic that "the ritual experts use sacrifices and other rituals to provide absolutions [λύσεις] and purifications [καθαρμοὶ] from transgressions both to those who are still living *and to those who have already died.*"[207] The special knowledge that these itinerant ritual specialists have received from Orpheus and Musaeus apparently allows the living a chance to help their ancestors by "ameliorating their postmortem situation through rituals."[208] Whatever these rituals are, then, it is clear that they are being performed by the living on behalf of the dead, who are believed to have received an unfortunate fate because of something they did (or failed to do) while alive.

This last point fits well within what we have already reviewed regarding late archaic conceptions of the afterlife: the dead are punished or rewarded on the basis of their conduct in life, unless, as Johnston makes clear, "they had prepared beforehand by being initiated into mystery rites that released them from paying for their transgressions after death."[209] It is significant that the rites these itinerant specialists are said to perform can serve the dead just as well as the living, and can initiate them into "mysteries" on the spot. The τελεταί performed on behalf of the dead seem to be intended to improve their postmortem situation, to "redeem" them from "the pains of hell," so to speak. That the living can have these rites performed for *themselves* just as well as for the dead suggests that we are not dealing with rites that are unique to

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[207] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 52, emphasis original.

[208] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 52.

[209] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 54.

the dead. Rather, we are dealing with a variation of a normal practice: instead of having these τελεταί performed for themselves, they have themselves initiated *on behalf of* their ancestors. This reading of the text is by no means far-fetched, as indicated by Johnston's statement that "Orpheus and Musaeus were particularly associated with such initiations."[210]

What we are left with, then, is a clear instance of initiation rites being performed by the living on behalf of the dead. If, as most scholars believe, people were initiated into the early Christian communities through a rite of adult baptism, then it would seem that the baptisms performed by the living on behalf of the dead mentioned in 1 Cor 15:29 (οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν) may also be described as "postmortem variations"[211] of an initiation rite normally performed for the living. In this respect, the Corinthian practice is analogous to the practice referred to in the passage from the *Republic*.

However, the identification of this analogy is not enough. Far too often in the history of comparison between early Christianities and other Hellenistic religions, the identification of parallels has been pursued as an end unto itself, or has been seen as a self-evident "explanation" of the phenomena compared, with the result that insufficient attention has been paid to the *context* and the *logic* of these practices. Merely citing a "parallel" between 1 Cor 15:29 and lines 364b5-365a3 of Plato's *Republic* is not informative. In order to shed light on the practice of baptism for the dead, a third datum must be examined which will aid us in answering the question of

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[210] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 54-55.

[211] A term I borrow from Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 54.

why these rites would be performed on behalf of the dead. The Eleusinian Mysteries offer an answer to this question.

Eleusinian Elusions of Chthonic Powers and Pollutions

As already shown, Thomas Wilson has suggested that a passage from Plato's *Republic* could serve as an analogy to the practice of baptism on behalf of the dead mentioned by Paul. However, because Wilson mentioned this passage in the context of a discussion of the Eleusinian Mysteries, Günter Wagner was able to dismiss this "parallel" without reflecting upon it, merely stating that these lines have "no bearing upon Eleusis." While it is certainly true that the "Orphic" rites mentioned in that passage are in no way related to the Eleusinian Mysteries, Wilson's error may be described as serendipitous, for it extends the comparative field to include the Eleusinian data, which provide an interesting example of the relation between baptism/initiation and a blessed afterlife, and thus are able to shed light upon the motivation behind the performance of τελεταί on behalf of the dead.

In the context of Wagner's discussion, his description of Eleusinian initiation is given so that the Pauline theology of "dying and rising with Christ" (as expressed in Romans 6:1-11) can be isolated from any "pagan" influence such as Eleusis. While Wagner's discussion of the various "mysteries" is very careful and informative, he nonetheless falls into the same pattern as countless other scholars by assuming Pauline theology as normative for all early Christianities. The interesting result is that, while Wagner's reading of the "mysteries" is very well done and finely nuanced,

his reading of Christianity is flawed. Aside from this, however, what is most intriguing is Wagner's demonstration of the lack of the "dying and rising" pattern at Eleusis. It has often been argued—or merely assumed—that the myth of Demeter and Kore-Persephone is a "nature drama" corresponding to (or perhaps even explaining) the seasonal waxing and waning of vegetation. This is incorrect. In the case of Eleusis, as Wagner makes clear:

> [t]he Rape of Kore to the Nether World does not coincide with the disappearance of the earth's fertility—the drought is an act of vengeance on the part of Demeter. Nor is Kore the seed-corn that must die in the darkness of the earth in order to be resurrected as a seedling.[212]

Wagner's reading of the text seems to be accurate. In context, Demeter does not bring about the drought and famine until *after* her failed attempt to adopt the mortal Demophon as her child. Thus, Kore's disappearance has nothing to do with the waning of the earth's fertility. This is brought about by Demeter's frustration at her failed attempted to *replace* Kore. It was only after this failure that the sources say:

> αἰνότατον δ' ἐνιαυτόν ἐπὶ χθόνα πουλυβότειραν ποίης' ἀνθρώποις καὶ κύντατον, οὐδέ τι γαῖα σπέρμ' ἀνίει· κρύπτεν γὰρ ἐϋστέφανος Δημήτηρ. πολλὰ δὲ καμπύλ' ἄροτρα μάτην βόες εἵλκον ἀρούραις, πολλὸν δὲ κρῖ λευκὸν ἐτώσιον ἔμπεσε γαίῃ.
>
> She made the most terrible, most oppressive year for men upon the nourishing land, and the earth sent up no seed: for well-crowned Demeter hid it away. Oxen drew many curved plows over the soil in vain. Much white barley seed fell useless on the earth (*Hom. h. Cer.*, 305-309).

[212] Wagner, *Pauline Baptism*, 86.

Therefore, the cycle of Kore-Persephone's ascent and descent to and from the Underworld does not coincide with the waxing and waning of vegetation. This is not the point of the myth.

Rather, the interpretation offered by Wagner is that Kore-Persephone's position as Queen of the Dead expresses the realization that fertility and death are inter-related. Life depends on fertility and the growth of vegetation. By providing the knowledge of agriculture, the goddesses "provided for the destiny of man himself. Demeter gave them a rite and a vision through which they might gain certainty that a happy lot awaited them after their death."[213] Recalling our earlier discussion of DeMaris, it should be noted that, as Wagner demonstrates, the primary focus of the Demeter cult at Eleusis was the fertility aspect. However, the focus on a "happy afterlife" also betrays an Underworld aspect, even if it is not the foremost concern. According to Wagner, this confidence in a happy afterlife "is the vision of the *mystai*. It is the ground of all their blessedness, their hope that in the Hereafter theirs will be a happier lot than that granted to the uninitiated."[214] It should be emphasized that this confidence "presupposes neither a dying and rising again nor a rebirth." Most importantly, this confidence "is not the certainty of having attained immortality, for this is also presupposed for the uninitiated."[215]

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[213] W. F. Otto, "The Meaning of the Eleusinian Mysteries," in *The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, vol. 2: 21; quoted in Wagner, *Pauline Baptism*, 86.

[214] Wagner, *Pauline Baptism*, 87.

[215] Wagner *Pauline Baptism*, 87. See 87 n. 104 for a rich bibliography of both primary and secondary sources supporting the assertion that everyone—initiated and uninitiated—was assured of immortality, albeit of greater or lesser quality, depending on one's status.

As far as it goes, Wagner's description is entirely accurate. There is more, however, and it renders the parallel with the passage from the *Republic* more significant, and more informative, than might at first be thought. As Sarah Johnston has discussed, three types of dead are, cross-culturally, considered the most violent and dangerous: the dead who have not received funeral rites (ἄταφοι); the "untimely" dead (ἄωροι); and the ones who have met with a violent death (βιαιοθάνατοι).[216] It is the latter type of dead that shall prove most informative to us in this discussion.

We have already seen that our sources convey the idea that the dead both require and desire the aid of the living. The needs of the dead might include food offerings, libations, and such, but also more "earthly" desires, such as keeping warm and comfortable in the tomb.[217] There is even evidence that the dead have religious needs and desires, such as rites of initiation or purification.[218] Most important among the needs of the dead was, of course, the need for burial, and the plots of many plays, such as Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Ajax* and Euripides' *Suppliant Women* center around such primary needs of the dead.[219] As already discussed, the living might take care of the dead out of affection, but it is just as likely they would take care of the dead out of fear. Those who mistreated the dead or failed to meet their needs could suffer madness, illness, or an untimely demise. Most feared of all, however, was the wrath of the murdered dead, who would return to haunt their murderers. A Chorus from the

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[216] Cf. Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 127.

[217] Cf. the story of Melissa and Periander in Hdt. 5.92η, quoted in Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 27 n. 68.

[218] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 55.

[219] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 27.

Choephoroi warns that "Those beneath the earth blame and are angered against their murderers" (A. *Ch.* 39-41).[220] Compare this passage from the *Laws* of Plato:

> But let [the good man] take heed not to despise what the old and venerable myth teaches us. It tells us how he who is done to death with violence...has his wrath kindled against the author of the deed in the days while it is still fresh, how he is filled with fear and horror at his bloody fate, how he is aghast to see his murderer traveling streets that were once familiar to him, and how in his own turmoil [the disembodied soul] joins forces with the very memory of the murderer to bring all possible distraction upon him and all his works (Pl. *Lg.* 865d5-e6).[221]

And also this passage from Xenophon's *Cyrus*: "Have you never yet noticed what terror the souls of those who have been foully dealt with strike into the hearts of those who have shed their blood, and what avenging powers they send upon the track of the wicked?" (X. *Cyr.* 8.7.18-19)[222]

All of these texts show that the wrath of the dead, and the wrath of the *biaiothanatoi* in particular, was a thing to be feared. This leads us to an issue dealt with by Johnston: "the relationship between *biaiothanatoi* and *miasma* [pollution]."[223] She points to the evidence found in Antiphon's *Tetralogies*, where "*miasma* seems to be equated with the anger of the dead or with a supernatural agent

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[220] See Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 27 n. 69 for further sources.

[221] As quoted in Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 28.

[222] As quoted in Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 28.

[223] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 129.

whom the dead person employs such as an *alastōr*",[224] as well as the observation of Erwin Rohde that "rites described as 'purificatory' sometimes include elements that look far more like efforts to appease the dead or chthonic powers who championed them."[225] She also points to the way in which pollution could hinder one's descent into the Underworld, as this passage from Plato's *Phaedrus* illustrates:

> The soul that is tainted by [the corporeal] is weighed down and dragged back into the visible world, through fear, as they say, of Hades or the invisible, and it hovers about tombs and graveyards. The shadowy apparitions that have actually been seen there are the ghosts of those souls that have not got clear away, but still retain some portion of the visible, which is why they can be seen…Of course, these are not the souls of the good, but of the wicked, and they are compelled to wander about these places as a punishment for their bad wantonness in the past (Pl. *Phd.* 81c10-d9).[226]

In light of this, she argues that the relation of *biaiothanatoi* and *miasma* suggests that ""being polluted' should be understood, more often than is generally recognized, as the state of having the dead angry at one" and that "to be 'purified' of the pollution of a blood crime and to be freed from the ghost must often have been part of the same process, or even wholly the same process."[227] It is in this context that her discussion turns to the mystery initiations at Eleusis.

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[224] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 129; see 129 n. 5 for the relevant primary sources.

[225] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 129; see also 129 n. 7.

[226] As quoted in Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 27.

[227] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 130.

Wagner has amply demonstrated that, although the Eleusinian initiations did involve a staged "journey" of the *mystai* down into the Underworld (or, as Wagner calls it, the Nether World), this can by no means be understood as a symbolic death and resurrection. It merely expresses "their hope that in the Hereafter theirs will be a happier lot than that of the uninitiated." We must now ask what that "happier lot" entails.

Johnston maintains that "ghosts or their agents…were represented as threatening the initiate during some part of the process of initiation at Eleusis."[228] She further suggests that this "was probably intended to be understood as a real threat at the time of the initiation (that is, the ghosts might try to prevent completion of the initiation…) and as a reminder of what awaited the uninitiated after death."[229] This interpretation is strengthened by a line from Proclus, who informs us that "in the holiest of mysteries [meaning the Eleusinian mysteries], before the gods arrive, the emanations of chthonic demons become manifest and visions frighten the initiates, distracting them from the good things that the gods have to offer" (Procl. *In Alc.* 340.1).[230] If indeed the angry dead were a threat to the *mystai* during these initiations, then it is clear that those with any kind of blood-guilt on their hands would be especially vulnerable. This is perhaps why murderers and criminals were explicitly prohibited from participation in the mysteries (see Isocrates, *Or.* 4.157.1.79; cf. Aristophanes, *Ra.* 370.4; Origen, *C. Celsum* 3.59). This may also be part of the reason for the existence of the so-called "Lesser Mysteries," which were, in myth, portrayed

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[228] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 130.

[229] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 130-31.

[230] Cf. Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 132 n. 17.

as having been introduced in order to allow Heracles to be initiated (Apollodorus 2.5.13.2-3; Diod. Sic. 4.25.14).[231] In the myth, Heracles wished to be initiated at Eleusis, but was barred from doing so because he still bore the blood-guilt of the murder of the centaurs. Demeter performed a ritual for him, and thus he was purified,[232] after which he was allowed to be initiated at Eleusis.

The importance of the myth of Heracles—and the Eleusinian mysteries—for our topic becomes clear if we recall *why* Heracles wanted to be initiated at Eleusis in the first place: "he was about to embark on a trip to the Underworld in order to fetch Cerberus and believed that initiation would provide special protection during this most difficult journey, a journey that other people would make only after their deaths."[233] What this suggests is that the initiates of the Eleusinian mysteries sought protection against the inhabitants of Hades, such as the angry *biaothanatoi* or their agents, and other chthonic demons.

In this respect we are reminded of another story of a descent into Hades, albeit this time of a more comic nature: Dionysus and Xanthias' journey downwards, as portrayed in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. After receiving directions from no less than Heracles himself, the two embark upon their journey. During their descent, just before they reach the area of the Underworld where the initiates of Eleusis are performing sacred rites to Demeter and her "holy noble daughter" (Ar. *Ra.* 375), the travelers are confronted by the terrible Empousa, a shape-shifting ghost who tries to frighten the travelers into abandoning their journey and turning back (Ar. *Ra.* 286-

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[231] Cf. Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 65-67.

[232] Cf. Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 132 n. 19.

[233] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 133.

305). Aristophanes has, of course, given Empousa a comic aspect, having her change from an ox to a donkey, from a beautiful woman to a hideous crone with a flaming face, and so on. However, "it seems that *empousa* was a real term for the sort of angry soul that was imagined to cause problems for both the initiate at some stage of the initiatory process and the uninitiated after death."[234] Johnston looks at a number of primary sources[235] and suggests that the term *empousa* is most likely a personified form of a descriptive adjective: "just as 'harpies' snatched (*harpazein*) their victims, so *empousai* hindered (*empodizein*) theirs, impeding secure passage of the soul either through the process of initiation or on the way to safe haven in Hades after death."[236] Keeping in mind the dangers posed by the *biaothanatoi* and their agents (such as the *empousai*) to those who had not purified themselves from *miasma*, it is clear that one purpose of initiation into the "lesser" mysteries was to protect oneself during initiation into the "greater" mysteries, which would in turn secure protection and safe passage for oneself in the afterlife.

As a final note, it would probably be a mistake to associate the concept of *miasma* too closely to that of "blood-guilt," if by the latter term we limit the concept to pollution caused by murder. If, by contrast, we can understand the "pollution" to be overcome at Eleusis on analogy with "pollution" referenced on the Orphic gold tablets associated with certain Bacchic mysteries, perhaps we can see *miasma* more as a general, symbolic, or even universal pollution. The Orphic gold tablets claimed that all human beings were tainted by the Titans' murder of Dionysus-Zagreus, and that

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[234] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 133.

[235] See Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 134 n. 22 and the related discussion on 133-34.

[236] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 134.

"salvation" required atonement for this "pollution." Only then could one present oneself as pure to Persephone, Queen of the Dead, after one's death.[237]

In light of the Eleusinian data we have been reviewing in this section, I would argue that the purpose of performing τελεταί on behalf of the dead, as in the passage from the *Republic*, might be in order to cleanse the uninitiated dead from their *miasma*, which would perhaps free them from the miseries of the uninitiated and the torments of the *empousai*, and allow them to reach safe haven in the Underworld. Having learned all that we can from these two sites, we will turn, in the next section, to a discussion of the Corinthian Christian practice of baptism on behalf of the dead, and the implications that this redescribed practice has for our imagination of the Corinthian Christ association.

[237] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 138 n. 40.

4) Comparisons, Constructs, and *Christos*

Cancel my subscription to the resurrection.
—Jim Morrison

Because comparison is an active enterprise of the imagination, which, "kaleidoscope-like, gives the scholar a shifting set of characteristics with which to negotiate the relations between his or her theoretical interests and data stipulated as exemplary,"[238] one might say that the data we have just reviewed allows us to change one of the gems in the kaleidoscope, thus altering our view of the Corinthian data, and allowing us to imagine the Christ association in a new way. If we conceive of baptism on behalf of the dead as a postmortem variation of an initiation ritual, with the data from Plato's *Republic* and the Eleusinian mysteries helping us to understand the significance of such a practice, there is a noticeable "shift" in the relations between the various Corinthian data. The implications of such a shift fall into place rather quickly, and it is easy to redescribe the Corinthian data accordingly.

Corinthian Concerns about the Afterlife

Turning to 1 Cor 15, we immediately notice that Paul is berating the Christians at Corinth for not believing in a resurrection (1 Cor 15:12). This is significant in light of the Eleusinian data, where the μύσται had no concept of rebirth or resurrection, but only expected to live on—in a blessed state—in the Underworld. Since this is the case, we should suspect that the Corinthians understood baptism not as a means of "dying and rising with Christ," as Paul did, but as a rite of initiation that would ensure

[238] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 53.

for themselves a blessed lot in the afterlife. With respect to this goal of securing a happy afterlife, we may see the Corinthian practice as analogous to the Eleusinian practice. Furthermore, if the early Christians at Corinth imagined the sufferings of the uninitiated dead to be anything like that imagined at Eleusis, then we can surmise that there was an urgent desire to see their dead initiated. The reference to τελεταί performed on behalf of the dead in Plato's *Republic* is, in this respect, a strong analogy as well. Not only do we find, in both instances, rites performed by the living on behalf of the dead, but we also find in both instances that rites normally performed by the living as rites of initiation have been creatively reworked into postmortem variations by which the dead can reap the benefits of the initiation they failed to receive while alive.

Nor is this all. The Eleusinian data presented by Sarah Johnston suggests another analogy in the Corinthian data. Recalling the dangers posed to the Eleusinian initiates by the *empousai* (ἔμπουσαι), who would hinder and impede the unprotected soul's progress into the Underworld after death, it is quite likely that the Corinthians imagined that similar chthonic demons and angry ghosts would bar their way into the Underworld, as well.

This is a departure from, or at least a reversal of, James Downey's proposal that the Corinthians understood baptism for the dead—and, by extension, baptism for themselves—as a ritual that would protect them from cosmic "principalities and powers"[239] (cf. Eph 3:10) that would hinder them on their journey to heaven. Noting, first of all, that "baptism on behalf of the dead would imply the possibility of

[239] James Downey, "1 Cor 15:29 and the Theology of Baptism," *Euntes Docete* 38 (1985), 23.

something akin to conversion after death,"[240] Downey suggests that the Corinthian Christians were worried about their ancestral dead, who, "not having been baptized, would be prey to the influence of the cosmic powers [who might hinder them during their ascent to heaven]. Consequently the living were baptized on behalf of the dead."[241] In support of his thesis, he reviews much of the language Paul uses in 1 Corinthians, and characterizes Paul's references to the ἀρχόντες τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (1 Cor 2:6,8; 15:24); τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου (1 Cor 2:12); θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι πολλοί (1 Cor 8:5); ἀγγέλοι (11:10); πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ δύναμιν (15:24); and θάνατος (15:26) as references to "cosmic spirit forces which possess and control not only individual human lives but the very course of the universe."[242] Downey also strangely characterizes this (common) Hellenistic reaction to the onset of the Ptolemaic cosmology as "gnostic mentality," and takes 1 Cor 15:29 as evidence for the "'gnostic' reaction [of the Corinthians] in the face of the cosmic powers."[243] However, he is careful to point out that, although Paul "undoubtedly accepted the existence and presumably the influence of the cosmic powers," he "differs" from the Corinthians' "gnosticism" because "he offers a different solution" to the same problem: namely, that "salvation comes because Christ will subjugate the powers."[244]

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[240] Downey, "1 Cor 15:29 and the Theology of Baptism," 24.

[241] Downey, "1 Cor 15:29 and the Theology of Baptism," 25.

[242] Downey, "1 Cor 15:29 and the Theology of Baptism," 30, quoting G. H. C. MacGregor, "Principalities and Powers: The Cosmic Background to Paul's Thought," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954-55), 19.

[243] Downey, "1 Cor 15:29 and the Theology of Baptism," 30.

[244] Downey, "1 Cor 15:29 and the Theology of Baptism," 30-31.

Setting aside Downey's unnecessary invocation of "gnosticism"[245]—a term that some scholars, myself included, would now find excessively anachronistic when applied to the Corinthians of the first century—it is enough to note the similarity of Downey's proposal with Richard DeMaris' argument that "vicarious baptism was one among several funerary rituals the Corinthian Christians used to help the deceased community member through the difficult transition between life and death."[246] However, as a slight correction to Downey, and more in line with DeMaris, I argue that it was not exactly *cosmic* powers the Corinthians feared, but rather, something like the dangerous *chthonic* powers, such as the *biaiothanatoi* and the *empousai*, which might have hindered them on their journey to the realm of the dead—whether that realm was conceived in "chthonic" terms as the Underworld or in "cosmic" terms as the "sphere of the dead." What the Corinthians may have feared were cosmic powers with chthonic characteristics, or perhaps, chthonic powers with cosmic characteristics.

This has interesting implications for understanding the Corinthian situation. This is because Paul's Christ myth, as expressed in Phil 2:6-11 and—in a pseudo-Pauline context—Col 1:15-20, has so often been considered a thoroughly "cosmic

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[245] A good summary of the literature on "gnosticism" in first-century Christianity generally, and Corinth specifically can be found in David G. Horrell and Edward Adams, "The Scholarly Quest for Paul's Church at Corinth: A Critical Survey," in *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (ed. Edward Adams and David G. Horrell; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 16-23. For general critiques of the category, the two essential works are Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), and Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[246] DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," 676.

myth."[247] If this is the case, then it is difficult to see how a cosmic myth, based upon the Ptolemaic cosmology, could have been received as a "chthonic myth," or indeed, as a myth with any "chthonic" implications at all. Such a scenario is admittedly implausible, *if* we read Paul's message as a cosmic, spiritualistic, otherworldly mythology. Recently, however, Richard A. Horsley has provided a potent (and very persuasive) correction to this view with the publication of the edited volume, *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*,[248] which emphasizes the highly political (and, some might say, "this-worldly") nature of Paul's rhetoric, thus calling into question the overly "spiritual" or "cosmic" readings of Paul.

A "This-Worldly" Christ Myth

Horsley criticizes the widespread tendency of New Testament scholars and historians of Christian origins to ignore the Roman imperial context of Paul's letters, and argues that this context must be taken seriously in order to understand the nature of Paul's "gospel." In this regard, Horsley especially emphasizes the importance of the Roman Imperial cult during this time and highlights its relevance to our understanding of Paul:

> During the 50s the apostle Paul moved systematically through eastern Mediterranean cities such as Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth proclaiming the "gospel of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:12; 2 Cor. 2:12; 9:13; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess.

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[247] See, for example, Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 120-23.

[248] Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997).

> 3:2). Yet by then the "gospel of Caesar" had already become widespread and well established in those very cities. Paul reassured the Philippians that they could expect a "Savior from heaven." But the imperial savior had long since established 'peace and security' throughout the Mediterranean world, and the cities of Greece and Asia Minor had long since established shrines, temples, citywide festivals, and intercity games in which to honor their savior. Paul taught that God had "highly exalted [Jesus Christ]…so that every knee should bend…and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:9-11). However, the divine lord, to whom all did obeisance and to whom all declared loyalty ("faith"), was already enthroned in Rome.[249]

Correlations such as these between the Imperial cult ideology and Paul's "gospel" should not be ignored. Many historians and archaeologists have recently begun to recognize the surprising extent to which the emperor cult was the medium through which imperial power relations were implemented and concretized throughout the Roman provinces. Noting that "Roman warlords used crucifixion as an instrument to terrorize subject peoples into submission to imperial rule," and stressing that "Roman military violence established the material, political, and cultural conditions in which the Christian movement originated," Horsley cautions scholars not to ignore the religio-political significance of the fact that the crucified Christ was at the core of Paul's message.[250] At Corinth specifically, "[p]articular acts of devastation framed the period and disfigured the sites in which the [early Christian] movement took

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[249] Horsley, "General Introduction," in *Paul and Empire*, 3-4.

[250] Horsley, "The Gospel of Imperial Salvation: Introduction," in *Paul and Empire*, 10.

root."[251] This is because "the Romans ruthlessly sacked and torched Corinth, one of the most illustrious Greek cities, slaughtered its men, and enslaved its women and children in 146 B.C.E. Then, a century later, Julius Caesar reestablished the city as a Roman colony peopled with freed slaves and expendables from Rome. The Romans similarly planted colonies of military veterans at Philippi and Thessalonica following the battle of Actium in 31 B.C.E."[252]

> What is especially significant, for Horsley's purposes, is that
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> [f]or nearly three generations before the time of Paul's mission in Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus…those areas were completely pacified. In fact, the imperial order in areas such as the provinces of Achaia, Macedonia, and Asia did not even require an administrative bureaucracy, let alone a military presence. One of the truly remarkable changes under Augustus was that the *imperium Romanum* became consolidated into a much more unified entity than a mere collection of provinces.[253]

This development seems partially explainable by the way in which "imperial power relations became constituted in the images, shrines, temples, and festivals of the imperial cult. Moreover, since the provincial elite…were also the principal sponsors of the imperial cult, the political-religious institutions in which power relations were constituted were virtually inseparable from the local social-economic networks of imperial society."[254] The effect was that the temples, shrines and images of the

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[251] Horsley, "Gospel of Imperial Salvation," 10.
[252] Horsley, "Gospel of Imperial Salvation," 11.

[253] Horsley, "Gospel of Imperial Salvation," 11.

[254] Horsley, "Gospel of Imperial Salvation," 11.

emperor came to dominate a city's material landscape, and the festivals and ceremonies related to the emperor cult also "permeated public life and the culture generally as well as public space," thus constantly reminding the Greeks that they were citizens of the Roman Empire. They lived their lives in the shadow of the emperor.[255]

To illustrate this, Horsley's volume collects a number of texts by various authors, who contribute to an understanding of Paul that takes the Roman imperial context of his writings into account. Recognizing that much of Paul's language "would have evoked echoes of the imperial cult and ideology," Horsley argues that Paul "was presenting his gospel as a direct competitor of the gospel of Caesar."[256] Dieter Georgi[257] argues that Paul's letter to the Romans uses such "loaded terms as *euangelion* [the 'gospel' of the imperial Savior], *pistis* [the 'loyalty' or faithfulness of Caesar/Rome, to be reciprocated by the 'loyalty' of her subjects], *dikaiosynē* [the 'justice' imposed by Caesar], and *eirene* [the 'peace' or good order secured by Roman conquest] as central concepts" in order to highlight the counter-imperial nature of Paul's message.[258]

This counter-imperial message is further illustrated by Paul's employment of the term *sōtēr* (savior), "in an unmistakably political context at the climax of the argument in [Phil. 3:20-21, which] sharply opposes Jesus Christ as Lord to the

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[255] Horsley, "Gospel of Imperial Salvation," 21.

[256] Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 140.

[257] Dieter Georgi, "God Turned Upside Down," in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 148-57.

[258] Georgi, "God Turned Upside Down," 148; as quoted by Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 140.

imperial savior."[259] Though many translators "have tried to tone down the implications through devices of individualization…or spiritualization…the meaning is abundantly clear once considered in the imperial context."[260] But surely "the most blatantly anti-Roman aspect of [Paul's] gospel was its focus on the crucified Christ."[261]

The evidence presented by Horsley leads one to the conclusion that "Paul's fundamental gospel," which claimed "that the political insurrectionary crucified by the Romans had then been enthroned as the true Lord of the world and was imminently to return in *the* (eschatological) *parousia* (a reference to an imperial entrance to a subject city)," was a profoundly political-religious message with a pronounced counter-imperial agenda.[262] The agonistic nature of Paul's language, and his confiscation of the terms and concepts used to describe the emperor, make plausible the view that he was presenting Christ Jesus as a "counter-emperor." This means that Paul's Christ myth was not primarily a "cosmic" myth. It is ironic, then, that many scholars "have tended to follow the deutero-Pauline spiritualization of Pauline language,"[263] found especially in Colossians (1:16; 2:10, 15) and Ephesians (6:12), thus obfuscating the political-religious nature of the Pauline message.

I have devoted so much space to this topic because it makes more plausible the "redescription" that I have performed for the Corinthian data so far, which seems

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[259] Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 141.
[260] Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 141.

[261] Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 141; cf. Neil Elliott, "The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross," in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 167-83.

[262] Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 141-42.

[263] Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 142.

to reveal the presence of some Corinthian Christians who would have found a "purely" cosmic Christ myth quite uninteresting. In light of what we have learned from Horsley, it would seem that the truly striking thing about Paul's message would be precisely its "this-worldly" nature—or, better, the fact that it imagines a "celestial" figure with fiercely "terrestrial" significance. Paul presented Christ as a cosmic figure with worldly associations and influence. The chthonic preoccupation revealed by DeMaris' study of the archaeological data of this period, and the apparent chthonic logic revealed by the Corinthian Christian practice of baptism on behalf of the dead, makes it quite likely the Corinthians would have attached some "sub-worldly" or sub-terrestrial connotations to Christ. The fact that Paul presented them with a figure capable of bearing such connotations may very well have been part of the Corinthians' attraction to this *Christos* figure. But the issue is much more complicated than that. In the next section, I will attempt to account for the Corinthians' interest in the figure of *Christos*.

Why Were the Corinthians Interested?

This question is anything but simple. The Corinthians' interest in Paul's message is a very complex issue, and there is not much in the letter to go on. Given the general comparative approach I have adopted in this study, I propose that the best way to go about answering this question is through discovering situational analogies and seeing if their comparison elucidates the problem. Throughout the remainder of this study, situational analogies will preoccupy us.

Jonathan Z. Smith has made some suggestive first steps in answering our current question in an essay entitled "Re: Corinthians."[264] In a bold redescription, Smith compares the Corinthian correspondence with an ethnographic study of the Atbalmin (a tribe of Papua New Guineans who were converted to Christianity by "native" missionaries), and draws several interesting implications from this cross-cultural comparison. In order to make these implications relevant to our study, we will have to review "Re: Corinthians" *in extenso*, but at the outset, it should be noted that Smith's conclusions portray the Corinthian Christians as being more interested in a "spirit myth" than a "Christ myth." This is to say, it is Paul's language of "spirit" (πνεῦμα) that the Corinthians seem to be most interested in, and not the more cosmic elements of the *Christos* mythology. This is in keeping with our findings thus far, and adopting this perspective will prove very helpful in accounting for the Corinthian situation, although it will take us some time to work through all the thorns and brambles such a perspective raises.

I will highlight Smith's points that are the most relevant for clarifying the Corinthians' interest in "spiritual things" (τῶν πνευματικῶν; 1 Cor 12:1). First, Smith describes the Atbalmin as a group of 3,000 or so individuals living in settlements containing 30-40 people. After the initial European contact, which occurred around 1950, the majority of the Atbalmin converted to Christianity, having been missionized by "pastor" figures from the nearby Urapmin and Tifalmin tribes. This gave the Atbalmin Christians a sense of belonging to a widespread, trans-local community that crossed traditional ethnic lines to include both Europeans and Melanesians (342-343). However, it also created tension within the native social

[264] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 340-61. Subsequent citations to this work will occur in the text.

formations of the Atbalmin, because conversion required them to leave behind their indigenous religious practices. This proved unfeasible, as the indigenous religion was so thoroughly embedded into the quotidian life of the Atbalmin that it was impossible to remain in community with one's non-Christian neighbors if the indigenous ways were abandoned entirely. Especially relevant, for my purposes, is the extent to which kinship relations were established and maintained through ancestral mythologies and practices of ancestral reverence. Chief among these practices were the ritual modes of contact that allowed for the transmission of traditional wisdom, passed on from generation to generation via the medium of ancestral spirits (343). Smith cites Jack Goody's description of the general attitude towards these ancestral spirits:

> Since knowledge is held largely in the minds of men…the older are inevitably at once the most experienced, and the most privileged communicators, as well as the most likely to die, taking their knowledge with them to the world of the ancestors. The dead must therefore know more than the living; the forefathers are also the forebearers, the carriers of 'tradition.' And it is in the cult of the ancestors that the dead reveal some of their superior, more comprehensive knowledge.[265]

The missionaries' demand that the Atbalmin abandon their indigenous religious practices predictably led to a great deal of tension between the "native" identity and their newly-formed "Christian" identity. The negotiations of these tensions led very soon to the concomitant appearance of two new religious movements.

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[265] Jack Goody, "Foreword," in Fredrik Barth, *Cosmologies in the Making: A Generative Approach to Cultural Variation in Inner New Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; repr., 1993), xi

The first of these was a Christian "revival" movement,[266] which actively sought to end the non-Christian practices of the Atbalmin. The other was a nativistic movement,[267] "spurred, in the early 1980s, by the arrival of West Papuan refugees from conflicts in Irian Jaya with the Indonesian government who settled in villages close by the Atbalmin."[268] This nativism sought to eliminate all outside forces by uniting the "native" peoples together under the rubric of a Melanesian identity. The category "outside forces" included Christianity and Christians (345). The leaders of this movement called for a return to the old ways, and a reinstatement of the ancestral religious practices. They also claimed that they commanded special modes of contact with the spirits of the dead ancestors, who would aid them in their struggle to eliminate these "outside forces" (345). It is very interesting to note that, while both the Christian "revival" movement and the Melanesian "nativistic" movement prophesied the destruction of the opposing movement, they did not cancel each other out. Rather, both remained active for quite some time. The situation was such that, ten years later, after both movements had suffered a decline, an ethnographer could characterize the Atbalmin as being both "Christian and non-Christian at the same time" (345).

Smith begins to relate the New Guinean materials to the Corinthian materials by first characterizing the Atbalmin as a "relatively homogenous" community, explaining that by "relative homogeneity" he refers to "the fact that among folk who

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[266] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 343-44.

[267] Despite an over-reliance on Weberian terminology, Ralph Linton ("Nativistic Movements," *American Anthropologist* 45 [1943], 230-40) provides a good study of this category.

[268] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 344.

live in small-scale societies with traditional kinship systems, while ethnically identical, kinship serves both to manufacture difference and to overcome that difference" (357 n. 33). In other words, while these groups may be ostensibly heterogeneous, they are nonetheless *relatively* homogenous from an etic perspective, and can be classified as such based on a generally shared cultural order. He then identifies two main elements in the New Guinean materials that he argues will aid the scholarly imagination of the Corinthian Christian group(s). "The first is the ability of a small relatively homogenous community to absorb a stunning series of situational changes within a brief span of time through strategies of incorporation and resistance," and the second element "is the capacity of a small relatively homogenous community to experiment, simultaneously, with multiple modes of religion" (347). These two elements make "the presumption of the coexistence of multiple experiments by early 'Christian' communities as well as their localism" more plausible (347). Although, at first glance, the Atbalmin communities seem most closely to resemble "the Galilean villages associated with Q and the Jesus traditions," Smith argues that, even "in a locale such as Corinth, the clear presence of face-to-face communication networks, and the relative prominence of 'households' suggests the existence of analogous communities within the larger urban landscape" (347). Indeed, I would argue, from Paul's strangely local-yet-ecumenical address in 1 Cor 1:2,[269] that part of the attraction of the Christ association for the "native" Corinthians may have been the awareness that they were becoming part of a trans-local "network" of

[269] "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus…*together with all those in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*," emphasis added.

associations. In this way, then, the Corinthians and the Atbalmin may have felt an analogous "attraction" to the Christ traditions.

I agree with Smith, then, in thinking that this analogy "suggests the possibility of thinking of Paul (and others) as intrusive on the native religious formations of the Corinthians addressed in 1 Corinthians [as] analogous, to some degree, to intrusions on the Atbalmin" (347). Furthermore, as the Corinthians "are the result of a relatively recent displacement and re-placement: the resettlement of Corinth (44 B.C.), involving the movement of non-Roman populations of freed slaves from Greece, Syria, Judaea, and Egypt," Smith proposes that, in this respect, the Corinthians "bear some situational analogy to the West Papuan refugees" (348).

The West Papuans' concerns about the spirits of their ancestral dead and experimentation with modes of relation to those spirits may be helpful in our attempt to understand the Corinthians' concern with "spirit(s)." Noting that "[a]nalogous notions of oracular relations to the ancestors and the more proximate dead, within the context of a set of cultic relations and responsibilities to the dead, are…found in Papua New Guinea, Israel, and the ancient Near East and are likewise present in each of the culture areas from which the resettled population of Corinth was derived," Smith submits:

> we might imagine two different sorts of essentially familial practices obtaining for some groups in Corinth…One would focus on cultic relations with the spirit(s) of the now dislocated ancestors left behind, in the homeland. Such relations would include attempts to obtain oracular esoteric wisdom. Another would focus on cultic relations with the more immediate dead, now

> buried in Corinth, and would include a range of activities from memorial meals with the dead to oracles guiding present behavior, including moral guidance. I see nothing that would have prevented both sorts of honored dead being referred to as *pneumata*…or collectively, as *pneuma* (349).

This argument has merit. Recalling Jack Goody's generalization of Melanesian attitudes toward oracular contact with the dead, it is helpful to note that similar attitudes existed in the Hellenistic world. Plutarch (*De. Def. Or.* 431-32F), for instance, associates the spirits of the dead with oracles, claiming that disembodied souls have the gift of prophecy just as embodied souls possess the faculty of memory. Seneca (*Agam.* 867-908) and Lucan (*Phar.* 5.86-224) both describe prophecy or divination as an "ecstasy," as though a higher power—or, more appropriately in this context, an external spirit—takes over the seer's body and reveals its own wisdom. Why not imagine the Corinthian "spirit-talk" in just this way?

While Smith strings together many consequences of this redescription, most important for our purposes is his conclusion that

> a Christ myth would be, strictly speaking, meaningless to some Corinthian groups. If Christ, having died, is no longer dead, then this violates the fundamental presupposition that the ancestors and the dead remain dead, even though they are thoroughly interactive with their living descendants in an extended family comprising the living and the dead. For the ancestral dead, it is the fact of their death, not its mode and significance…that establishes and sustains their power (350-351).

Smith intends this as an explanation of the tension between Paul and the Corinthians, and there is a large precedent for adopting this model. For example, Luther H. Martin has argued that "for Paul and for early Christianity generally, redemption was the transcendence of all deterministic powers and authority that had its locus within the cosmic realm, whether celestial or terrestrial," despite the fact that this does not seem to have been the case, neither for Paul nor for the Corinthians.[270] Martin assumes that, for Paul, "freedom from the deterministic powers of the world, whether historically manifest in Jewish law and philosophical tradition or cosmologically manifest in the astrological rule of the heavenly powers, was expressed by the image of the redemptive ascent/resurrection of Christ to the otherworld of the Father."[271] Thus, in Martin's view, Paul understands "sin" to mean the deterministic powers of the cosmos, which the gospel of Christ allows one to transcend and overcome.

However, in light of Horsley's arguments for the highly political and counter-imperial nature of Paul's writings, this view is problematic. Paul's Christ myth is not the spiritualized, otherworldly mythology found in later Paulinist movements, but a politically-charged, counter-imperial myth that challenges the powers of *this* world. Thus, I would like to qualify Smith's statement that a "Christ myth would be, strictly speaking, meaningless to some Corinthian groups," because it is quite clear that Smith is still imagining Paul's Christ myth in a manner similar to that of Martin. So,

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[270] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 123. I continue to emphasize the limited nature of this description by reiterating such phrases as "at least some Corinthians," "some groups of Corinthians," and "certain groups of Corinthians" because I find it highly unlikely that what I am describing here pertains to all the Corinthian Christians. Not only does evidence from the letter itself suggest the "factional" nature of the Corinthian Christ association (e.g., 1 Cor 1:12-13), but it is also methodologically suspect to move from one model in which the assumed commonality and normativity of Pauline theology is used to stipulate homogeneity in the Christ association to another model in which funerary concerns and cults of the dead now stand in the place once occupied by Pauline theology.

[271] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 123.

while I agree with Smith that the overly-spiritualizing Christ myth as presented in the pseudo-Pauline letters (especially Colossians and Ephesians) would be meaningless to some Corinthian groups, it remains to be seen whether or not *Paul's* counter-imperial "gospel" would have been attractive to these groups.

Attraction, Part I: The Language and Meaning of "Sin"

First, I am tempted to argue—in light of the Eleusinian data—that if the language of "sin" had any significance at all to these Christians, it would most likely have been significant in a manner analogous to the *miasma* that initiates sought to overcome through initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries.[272] It would *not* be best described as relating to the deterministic powers of the cosmos. The *miasma* analogy seems especially plausible because of the relatively recent resettlement of Corinth, and the concomitant displacement of "freed slaves and expendables,"[273] which would have caused profound disruptions in the native religions of "here" to which the new inhabitants once belonged. Not the least of these disruptions would have been the sudden inaccessibility to the tombs of the ancestors. It is quite possible that Paul's language of slavery to "sin" could have been taken up and reworked by these Corinthians to refer to the "pollution" caused by the imperial intrusions and obstructions which had cut off their access to their ancestors. This might also have connoted something like the perils posed to the uninitiated by the dangerous (i.e.,

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[272] The standard work on *miasma* is Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

[273] Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 11; cf. Strabo 8.6.23.

unhappy, neglected) dead and their Underworld agents. With this in mind, I propose the "freedom" brought to them by *Christos* could have been understood as a purification from pollution/*miasma*/sin. This pollution could have posed a danger to the Corinthians before they underwent the rites, but would have been especially destructive to them had they died without being purified. Furthermore, because it was the Roman Empire that had forced the relocations that disrupted these ancestral traditions, we may plausibly suspect that Paul's counter-imperial gospel, in painting the Empire as the villain who had "polluted" their ancestral traditions, may have been quite attractive to such groups. The imperial intrusions had disrupted their kinship systems and thrown them into "sin," and the folk who had suffered these disruptions were totally helpless to do anything about it. In this respect, the attraction that *Christos*, who offered "freedom from the dominion of sin," might have held for some Corinthians can be redescribed as a counter-imperial ideology.

Attraction, Part II: Ethnicity, Heterodoxy, and Counter-Imperialism

A great assist to Horsley's arguments has been provided by William E. Arnal, in an paper entitled "*Doxa*, Heresy, and Self-Construction: The Pauline *ekklēsiai* and the Boundaries of Urban Identities."[274] Arnal begins with a discussion of the concepts "*doxa*," "heresy," "heterodoxy," and "orthodoxy," as developed in the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu, and presents the concept "*doxa*" as the "universe of the

[274] William Arnal presented versions of this paper at Princeton University and the University of Alabama, among other places; it will be published in an upcoming volume of the Princeton Seminar proceedings. I thank him for allowing me to see the manuscript.

undiscussed,"[275] or as that which "goes without saying" in a given society. *Doxa* represents, among other things, the categories and institutions by which people think and live the world around them. Most of the time, *doxa* cannot be thought past or through, because that which falls outside of *doxa* would be, quite literally, *unthinkable*. *Doxa* "goes without saying because it comes without saying,"[276] and has become so naturalized and internalized by the social actors who live "under" and "in" its sphere of influence that it just "fits" the world around them.

However, *doxa* may sometimes be called into question or come under criticism, and this for a number of reasons. Theorists tend to focus on cultural and social breakdown, the experience of alienation, deprivation, oppression, disillusionment, etc., as factors which make *doxa* become "visible" once again. "Heresy," for Arnal, is a departure from some elements of *doxa*, which amounts to "the intentional redeployment of socio-cultural tropes and other symbolic signifiers…to reconfigure fundamental beliefs about the world by those groups for whom shared assumptions have lost their self-evident quality."[277] Heresy is, in this model, an attempt to render *doxa* visible, thus subverting it by imagining and entrenching a new *doxa*.

According to Arnal, Paul's letters should not be seen as presenting a critique of Judaism, but should rather be seen as an attempt to construct "artificial Jews," or, to put it another way, as an attempt to radically extend the Jewish identity according to several non-material markers, thus creating an identity that could, potentially, be

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[275] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977), 168.

[276] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 167.

[277] Arnal, "*Doxa*, Heresy, and Self-Construction."

adopted by the entire world. This identity is not ethnically-based, nor does it rely upon the markers so commonly thought, in Paul's day, to be essential to "Jewish" identity, such as circumcision. Rather, Paul denies such material, physical, biological markers and collapses such distinctions as "Jew and Greek," "slave and free," and even "male and female" to create a new, potentially universal social identity. Thus, Arnal argues, Paul's "gospel" is a religious innovation within the Judaic tradition. In my language, I would say Paul creates an "enunciation," directed against the totalizing claims of the Roman Empire by means of a counter-imperial *ethnos*—an artificial oikoumenical Jewry.

This "enunciation" can be seen as an instance of a much wider trend, reviewed in chapter one, that is seen throughout the Hellenistic world. During this period, it will be recalled, we rarely ever encounter a "new religion" that is not better described as a new form of a religion with a centuries-old tradition. Paul's "Christianity," it seems, is best described in this way. The conception of "Christianity" as a separate, coherent social identity is a much later development, terribly anachronistic when applied to this time period.

However, it will also be recalled from chapter one that I tentatively explained this widespread development as a religio-cultural response to the generally shared imperial and colonial conditions of the Hellenistic age. As our review of Horsley has already shown, it is difficult to understand Paul's "gospel" as anything other than a response to the domination of the Roman Empire. Arnal's work only strengthens this view. For, Arnal argues, Paul's reconceptualized and radically extended "Jewish" identity is best seen as a direct challenge to the Roman imperial order. In the model of

doxa and heresy reviewed above, Paul appears as a "heretic" with respect to the Roman imperial *doxa*. Before Paul, the only potentially universal social identity was the *Roman* identity, and the imperial status of Rome was seen as the only identity capable of gathering all other "sub-altern," fragmentary identities under its roof. Paul challenged this. For this reason, it is crucial that Paul's "gospel" not be described as *anti*-imperial, as though it were merely a critique of imperial power *per se*. Rather, Paul criticizes and challenges *Roman* imperial power specifically, and the *ekklēsiai* he founded might better be described as experiments in *counter*-imperialism. Paul countered Roman imperialism with "Jewish" imperialism; he opposed Roman universalism by proposing *another* universalism. In this respect, Paul was a "heretic," yet it is important to remember that his "heresy" would not have been possible had it not been for the already-developed notion of Roman identity as potentially universalizable.

We shall have occasion to return to this last point in chapter five. For now, though, I wish to relate Arnal's arguments to my earlier discussion of Smith and the Corinthians' interest in ancestors. It seems to me that Paul, like the Corinthians, is interested in ancestral reverence, albeit of a different nature than the Corinthians' interest. For, while the Corinthians seem interested in the spirits of their ancestral dead, Paul seems interested in *Christos* as a substitute ancestral figure—roughly analogous to Abraham—who he perceives as founding a new "ethnicity." While Abraham established the material markers that define classical Jewish identity—e.g., circumcision—it seems that Paul, in presenting *Christos* as a sort of spiritual ancestor, is arguing that *Christos* has given those baptized in his name the spiritual (i.e., non-

material) markers that will henceforth define this radically extended "artificial Jewish" identity.

Contrary to Smith's suggestion that Paul and the Corinthians simply do not understand each other when they are talking about "spirits,"[278] it seems to me that they understand each other rather well. They *both* seem concerned with "spirits" and "ancestors," although they develop these interests in divergent manners. It is important to note, in this regard, that when Paul argues with the Corinthians' practices, he normally does not critique their practices *as such*, but rather the *way* in which they carry out these practices. Paul critiques the Corinthians when certain of their members are behaving in a way that alienates certain other members of the group, thereby disrupting the group's unity. It seems to me, then, that Paul's disagreements with the Corinthians might best be seen precisely as *disagreements*, and not as fundamental "misunderstandings."[279] To illustrate this, I now turn to one of the primary sections of 1 Corinthians which has been used to argue that Paul and the Corinthians misunderstood one another: 1 Cor 8-10.

Meals with, Meals for, the Dead

It would seem that the profound chthonic/funerary emphasis we are finding in first-century Corinth—and, by extension, the first-century Christ group at Corinth—allows us to shed light on a problem that has often perplexed scholars: Paul's discussion of

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[278] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 349-50.

[279] Many of these last points were developed in conversation with Bill Arnal, and my thanks go to him for helping me to see and to articulate these points.

"food offered to idols" (1 Cor 8, 10). In an essay entitled "The Cult of the Dead in Corinth," Charles A. Kennedy[280] has reformulated the problem by suggesting a new translation of the Greek *eidolothuton* (τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων), which has commonly been translated as "meat/food/things offered to idols" or as "idolatrous sacrifices." By contrast, Kennedy suggests we translate it as "memorial meals for the dead" (229), stating rather pointedly that the translation of *eidolothuton* as "meat sacrificed to idols" has

> gained its status [as the "correct" translation] from repetition rather than from linguistic analysis. The two elements of the word have been treated almost exclusively from the context of the LXX and the NT. The evidence from secular Greek usage and from the Hebrew sources has been overlooked or unrecognized. A fresh look at these other sources can provide a better translation of this puzzling term (229).[281]

Noting first of all that the use of *eidolon* "in the sense of 'idol' is rare in secular Greek," Kennedy argues that "image" or "likeness" might be a better translation. Above all, *eidolon* commonly refers to "the representation of a real person" (229). It also tends to connote "the shade or shadow of a person in the sense of the Latin *umbra*, the unsubstantial form and shape of one who had died" (229). It is in this

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[280] Charles A. Kennedy, "The Cult of the Dead in Corinth," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (ed. J. Marks and R. Good; Guilford, CT: Four Quarters, 1987), 227-36. Subsequent citations to this essay will be found in the text.

[281] See now the brilliant discussion in Smith, *Drudgery Divine* 54-84, where he examines the method by which the selective use of linguistic sources has been used to "insulate" early Christianity from "pagan" influence. Kennedy's remark on the selectivity of translation sources for *eidolothuton* is but the tip of the iceberg. Most often, the LXX has been used as a bulwark against influence from the Greco-Roman "environment," only to be denigrated once that danger has been eliminated. I like the terminology of Robert M. Price (1996) who describes this duplicitous maneuver as the use of Judaism as both "buffer" and "whipping boy."

sense that the *eidolon* "can be represented plastically in portraits and busts such as the funeral portraits and masks, which formed an important part of the cult of the dead in the ancient world" (230). The word, in this sense, "had its primary association with an image of a deceased member of the family" (230).

As for the element *–thuton*, it "is often translated as 'sacrifice,' but this term itself has a wide range of meanings…[A]s early as Herodotus VIII, 99, it had come to mean 'dinner party'" (230). The combination of these two elements, *eidolo-* and *thuton*, then, should "be understood to mean 'meal for the image of the deceased' or more simply 'a funerary meal/offering,' 'a memorial meal for the dead'" (230). So, Kennedy concludes, in 1 Cor 8-10, the real problem Paul is addressing "is Christian participation in the pagan funeral rites for members of the family or friends" (230).

Though he may be too reliant upon the questionable distinction between "Christian" and "pagan" during this time period, the crucial point that Kennedy makes is that, in contradistinction to the "Paulinist" interpretation of the Lord's Supper as a "sacramental" meal, there was a group of first-century Christians at Corinth (a Pauline church!) who were participating in a cult of the ancestral dead, and taking common meals for/with the dead. These meals were taken in the presence of masks made in the image of the deceased. These masks were prominent in the funerary rites as well as the cult. During these meals, "members of the family would be invited to wear [the masks], and whenever possible the build of the deceased would be matched with the build of the mourner. A further note of surrealism was added by having the maskers wear the clothes of the deceased they were impersonating" (231). By making the deceased appear to be present, there is a

continuity of relationship with the ancestors, and it is a relationship of exchange: the cult members "feed" their ancestral dead in exchange for the ancestors' blessing.

I would render 1 Cor 8:10-11 as "For if anyone sees you…reclining (κατακείμενον) in an idol's shrine (εἰδολείῳ), will not the conscience of him, being weak, be bolstered to the point of eating the memorial meals for the dead (εἰδωλόθυτα)?" Taking note of this verse, Kennedy makes a case for identifying "the site of the dinner mentioned [in that verse] with a tomb triclinium" (232). He explains this identification by noting that

> Roman tombs could be quite elaborate. Minimally the tomb marked off a plot of land that was consecrated for the burial of the dead [but could be much larger and more opulent]…While all of the tombs [were] intended to house or commemorate burials, this was only one of the reasons to erect a tomb monument. The periodic celebrations and memorial meals required a place to assemble, such as an *exedra* [parlor]. Where possible a garden was included in which flowers and food could be raised to help support the endowment. For the less affluent, the memorial meal would be more like a picnic; the wealthy could afford a complete dining room with adjacent kitchen. [Many tomb triclinia were] only a few steps off the street. Passers-by could look through the doorway and catch glimpses of the diners within. For some, if not most of the diners, it was desirable to be seen at these affairs. Members of the family would gain in their reputations for filial piety, while friends would like to be seen in the company of such devoted and hospitable friends (232-33).

Kennedy therefore suggests that Paul is worried about members of the Christ association who might be encouraged to engage in such meals for the (images of) the dead if they happened to pass by and see another member or group of members reclining by the tombs.[282] Like many other commentators, he assumes that the problem is primarily Paul's, rather than the Corinthians'. I would question the accuracy of this view. Given Paul's apparently shared interest in "ancestors" and "spirit(s)," and given the fact that cultic relations with the dead were probably not incomprehensible to him—an altogether implausible notion, likely based on the apologetic assumption that Paul, the good Jewish Christian, could never have understood or even conceived of this "superstitious" pagan practice—I would argue that Paul is disagreeing with the Corinthians at the level of *practice*, and not of *principle*. Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul seems concerned above all with maintaining unity among the members of his *ekklēsia*. Since he seems afraid that some members of the association will be offended or excluded by the practices of some other members—an exigency that would disrupt the unity of the new counter-empire—he seems to be calling for a compromise, telling them to alter their practices so that all members can be included.

Furthermore, I suggest that this practice of dining with the dead is not an innovation that occurred after Paul left Corinth for the first time. I find myself much more convinced by a view that seems to be gaining in acceptance, which holds that

[282] See, in this regard, Paul's statement at 1 Cor 14:23, where he worries about "the whole church" coming together and beginning to speak in tongues. What if this happens, he says, and "outsiders or unbelievers enter"? "Will they not say that you are out of your mind?" Recalling that the *necropoleis* were public, could this be referring to an assembly that meets in a tomb triclinium? It is quite likely that the sight of a group assembled around a tomb and speaking in tongues would lead an outsider to declare that the group was out of their collective mind!

Paul "superimposed" the *ekklēsia* format upon a pre-existing association. Despite Paul's rhetoric of "planting" (1 Cor 3:6), "laying a foundation" (1 Cor 3:10), and "becoming their father through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15), Burton L. Mack—both in his *Who Wrote the New Testament?* and in an unpublished paper presented to the SBL's Seminar on Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of Christian Origins[283]—has proposed that the Corinthians were already in the practice of meeting for meals when Paul visited them with his gospel.[284]

When Paul came to Corinth, we have every indication that he entered a city profoundly preoccupied by death and the dead. This preoccupation can at least partly be explained by the fact that, when looking at Roman Corinth, we are dealing with a freshly founded city; the population of which is entirely non-native (being comprised of both immigrants and freed slaves); in a colonial situation where both Greek and Latin are being spoken (though Latin would have been the "official" language); and where the Greek and Roman burial practices (inhumation and cremation, respectively) are being practiced simultaneously. Paul would likely have been attractive to an association of non-native religionists who routinely met for meals, and who were busily at work translating their ancestral religions of "here" into religions

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[283] Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote The New Testament?*, 104, 126; idem, "Finally Some Footnotes: Christ, *Christos*, and the Cult Question" (paper presented to the SBL Seminar on Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of Christian Origins, April 2004).

[284] That Paul might have approached a pre-existing Corinthian association in this way is made more plausible by the recent work of Richard S. Ascough, "The Thessalonian Christian Community as a Professional Voluntary Association," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000), 311-28. Ascough argues that Paul did not found the Thessalonian Christ association, but rather provided Christ as a patron deity for a pre-existing trade association. On the (historically unreliable) basis of Acts, scholars have assumed for years that Paul "evangelized" each new town in the same way: by visiting the synagogue first and gaining a hearing, then preaching to those who wished to hear more. It seems just as plausible, in light of Ascough's very convincing arguments regarding Thessalonica and the recent research on Corinth, to assume that Paul would have operated by gaining a hearing from pre-existing associations in each town he visited.

of "anywhere," which would have allowed them to continue their practices of ancestral reverence despite the inaccessibility of the ancestral tombs. Mack plausibly suggests that the Corinthians were interested in what Paul had to say because he would have appeared to them as "a traveling teacher/philosopher, with something of interest to say about 'wisdom,' 'spirits,' group identities, and meals in memory of ancestors."[285] Smith's observation that the population of freed slaves from Greece, Syria, Judaea, and Egypt came from cultures containing cultic relations with and responsibilities to the dead only strengthens this argument. And Kennedy's proposal that *eidolothuton* be translated as "memorial or cult meals for/with the dead" provides the perfect context for the Corinthians' meal: at the cemetery, where they could commune with their dead. The Corinthians' apparently shared interest in Paul's "spirit" language and his talk of "ancestors" makes plausible that his "gospel" would at least have been interesting enough to them that he could have gained an initial hearing.

In addition to Paul's "spirit" talk, I would argue that the Corinthians may well have found the *Christos* figure interesting enough to invest in an act of mythmaking on their part, which resulted in a specifically Corinthian *Christos* myth that circulated among some Corinthian groups. Inspired by Willi Braun's insight that "the social interests that [were] acted on and mystified and mythologized by [early] Christian groups were not interests unique to Christians,"[286] I would build upon the picture I have drawn by arguing that it is quite likely not only that the general Corinthian

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[285] Mack, "Finally Some Footnotes."

[286] Willi Braun, "Smoke Signals from the North: A Reply to Burton Mack's 'Backbay Jazz and Blues,'" in Cameron and Miller, *Redescribing Christian Origins*, 439-40.

preoccupation with the dead led to the Corinthians Christians' experimentation with ritual initiations performed for their dead—a practice which, it now seems, also made it possible for the living Corinthians to dine with their distant dead—but also that this preoccupation was in large part responsible for the Corinthians' attraction to *Christos* in the first place, as a powerful figure who could aid them in their attempt to maintain relations with their dead.

Theorizing a "Locative" Christos

In chapter two, it was shown that the material (and some textual) evidence for second-century Christianity reveals what I have been calling a "locative" religious tradition. In contrast to the elements once thought so essential to Christianity, the evidence reveals a group of Christ traditions without any concept of a "dying and rising god," without a "sacramental" baptism or cult meal, and without the hope of resurrection for the cult member. In short, the evidence for Christianity in the second-century displays the complete lack of "Paulinism."

As ironic as it may seem, the Christ group in first-century Corinth revealed to us through Paul's letters seems to be similarly lacking in "Paulinist" leanings. Indeed, what evidence we can glean from Paul's letters points toward a Christ association that is thoroughly locative in character. The lack of a risen cult figure, and the presence of (a non-"sacramental") baptism and cult meal for the dead, both signify that the assurance of a blessed afterlife which gave the initiates confidence in this life

constitutes the "soteriology" of the cult, and it has every indication of being a "locative" soteriology.[287]

How then did the Corinthians imagine *Christos* himself? Certainly not as a dying and rising god! In order to attempt to provide a plausible *Christos* for this group, it will be necessary first to provide a general consideration of the population of which this Christ group would likely have been comprised, and to attempt to understand what social interests may have led to the attraction of the *Christos* figure. It is quite likely that we are dealing in the main with an association comprised of a culturally heterogeneous immigrant population (second or third generation at most), and primarily made up of freed slaves from Greece, Syria, Judaea, and Egypt, and other locations. This suggests a diasporic population that has been displaced from its native, locative religions of "here," resulting in a native religion persisting in a

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[287] Smith's description of second-century Christianity as a group marked off by adult baptism, meeting for an extended kinship meal, and characterized by a high focus upon a cult of the dead fits in perfectly with the picture of first-century Corinthian Christianity as it has been described here. This makes the first-century Christ association at Corinth, one of the "Pauline churches," out to be an association in which there is no "dying and rising god," no "sacramental" baptism or cult meal, and no concept of salvation as "triumph over death" through some kind of resurrection. Therefore, even in a so-called "Pauline church," the three elements considered most essential to Pauline theology and often thought to be the *sine qua non* of early Christianity are nowhere to be found. This is strong evidence for a persistently "locative" brand of Christianity, with a long-standing tradition that extends at least from the mid-first to late-second century. This tradition might be extended back even further if we take into account the following observation made by Luther H. Martin, "History, Historiography, and Christian Origins," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 29 (2000), 79:

> [T]he "social artifacts" of this later [second-century] Christian material culture seemingly accord more with some of the early "Christian" literary interests than they do with the later Pauline or Lukan texts. There is, for example, "no place" in the Sayings Gospel Q or in the *Gospel of Thomas*, as in any pre-Constantinian archaeological evidence, for "a crucified Christ" or for any "symbol of divine death."

This insight from Martin suggests the presence of a widespread and long-standing locative tradition among several early Christianities: from the earliest Jesus movements to the rise of the Constantinian Church. Smith's earlier remark regarding the "clear presence of face-to-face communication networks, and the relative prominence of 'households'" in first-century Corinth, which "suggests the existence of analogous communities" to the Galilean Jesus movements and the second-century Christ groups "within the larger urban landscape" only strengthens this view. Certain early Christianities now appear *relentlessly* and *persistently* locative in nature.

diaspora situation. In such an urban diasporic center, as with most immigrant groups, we expect a circle of recent (first wave) immigrants, by whom the traditional forms of religion were devoutly maintained,[288] as well as a circle of second and even third wave immigrants, who might, by contrast, have become more integrated into the culture of the diasporic center, leading to a reinterpretation of the traditional religion. As Smith argues, for the native religionist as well as for the first wave immigrant, "homeplace, the place to which one belongs, was an important religious category." By contrast, for "the thoroughly diasporic member…freedom from place became the major religious category."[289] The interesting thing about Corinth is that we seem to be dealing with the *reinstatement* of a locative tradition, a case where a group could have become utopian but did not. By contrast, we are dealing with a group of displaced, locative social actors who are experimenting with ways to free themselves from the "old" place—or, to put it in Smith's terms, from the old religion of "here"—in order to establish for themselves a "new" place—again, in Smith's terms, a new "here." Bearing in mind my earlier suggestion of a *persistently* locative tendency among early Christianities, we should now ask after what kind of *Christos* would have been attractive to such a group.

First, the Corinthians would likely have been attracted to a *Christos* who could help them meet their socially- and culturally-patterned needs. The Corinthians' emphasis on their ancestral dead, and the problem of accessibility posed by the ancestors left behind in the homeland, stands out as a prime need. I propose that our understanding of the Corinthian situation can be aided by the distant analogy of

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[288] Smith, "Native Cults," 237.

[289] Smith, "Native Cults," 238.

Chinese immigrants in America, who also demonstrate a marked preoccupation with the dead.

The Overseas Chinese as a Helpful Analogy

Like the tradition of ancestor reverence found in Greco-Roman religion, the Chinese also have a long-standing tradition of ancestor reverence. As James L. Watson has shown, one of the primary features of Chinese mortuary practice is "the idea of *exchange* between the living and the dead. Death does not terminate relationships of reciprocity among Chinese, it simply transforms these ties and often makes them stronger."[290] As in other religions of "here," the presumed endless accessibility of the ancestors is an important part of Chinese religion, and dislocation from these ancestors constitutes a real threat. If the threat of dislocation becomes a reality, we would expect to see the development of strategies and techniques—religious or otherwise—either for overcoming this displacement, or dealing with it in some other way. When looking at Chinese emigrants living and working in the United States—cut off from hearth, home, and the familial burial site—these techniques and strategies are precisely what we do find.

Newspapers from the nineteenth-century United States frequently contained descriptions of elaborate funerals performed by the Chinese immigrants for their deceased. They also describe the way in which these burials were often disinterred and shipped from the United States to China. This trend continued throughout most of

[290] James L. Watson, "The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites: Elementary Forms, Ritual Sequence, and the Primacy of Performance," in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* (ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 9.

the twentieth century. However, in the early twenty-first century, the practice began to be reversed, "with many ancestors being removed from family graves in China and brought to [the United States], where families settled permanently [there] can observe traditional customs of honor and respect."[291]

This practice is interesting because the Chinese practice of exhuming the bodies of ancestors for reburial is by no means new. "Except for the sea voyage and the distance traveled, the concept of removing remains from the original grave is not too different from traditions prevailing even now in southern China."[292] In these traditions, the deceased receives a primary burial, after which the family provides offerings to his or her grave "at seven, fourteen, twenty-one, and on up to forty-nine days after the funeral, in the traditional seven-day mourning cycle, and on the birth date or anniversary of death of the deceased."[293] This practice continues for three to seven years, after which "members of the family, or, less often, part-time specialists, dig open the grave, clean the bones, and place them in an established order in a pottery urn called a…'golden womb,'" which is then reburied.[294]

In America, this traditional practice was maintained throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, with one major variation. In its native form, the practice of ancestor worship was typically linked to customs of inheriting the deceased's

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[291] Roberta S. Greenwood, "Old Rituals in New Lands: Bringing the Ancestors to America," in *Chinese American Death Rituals: Respecting the Ancestors* (ed. Sue Fawn Chung and Priscilla Wegars; Lanham: AltaMira, 2005), 241.

[292] Greenwood, "Old Rituals in New Lands," 247.

[293] Greenwood, "Old Rituals in New Lands," 242.

[294] Greenwood, "Old Rituals in New Lands," 242.

property, and was handled by the family.[295] In America, however, many Chinese did not have their families with them, if they had families at all. Therefore, burial societies were formed, which acted as "fictive" families. These associations were so prevalent that "ten thousand boxes of bones left the United States for China in 1913 alone," to say nothing of other years.[296]

In order to cast light on the Corinthian situation, we will have to begin by generalizing the example of the overseas Chinese to negotiate the enormous difference between the two sets of data. It can be said, generally, that for adherents of traditions based on filial piety and ancestor reverence, being cut off from hearth and home is a threat to their very identity, which is tied up in complex networks of practices and persuasions based upon the accessibility of the ancestors' graves. In response to this threat, ingenuity and creativity are required in an effort to maintain this identity, even if that involves changing the identity itself. Religious practices will have to be adapted, and new ways will have to be adopted, if this threat is to be overcome. In light of this, I would describe this practice of exhuming and shipping back the remains of their ancestors as a strategy employed by these early Chinese immigrants to maintain their Chinese identity by maintaining ties to China; or, in general terms, the knowledge that one would be buried in one's homeland provided one with a "fictive" tie to the homeland while one lived in diaspora. "Far from the security of family and home, individuals sought reassurance in the familiar

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[295] See Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973).

[296] Greenwood, "Old Rituals in New Lands," 245.

ceremonies of their homeland."[297] Most aspects of the practice were retained, with slight transformations. It was still imagined that a proper burial ensured that the deceased would become a benevolent ancestor, and providing for their material comfort was imagined to ensure that the living would reap blessings and receive their own material comfort in turn. "Because reburial of the individual in China would definitely ensure that the ancestor rested well, mourners paid special attention to the process of unearthing the bones and returning them to China. In death, the individual far from his native land could be guaranteed a connection to home and family."[298] As argued above, then, this practice can be described as a way of maintaining ties to the homeland in diaspora, or better, as a way of overcoming the displacement of diaspora by maintaining connections to home and family, by performing the proper rites, and by continuing to do the things that brings one a sense of being "Chinese."

If this is acceptable, then a further transformation can be explained in the same way. In contrast to the first wave of immigrants, who never intended to settle permanently in the United States, but hoped either to retire or be buried back in China, there are now stable communities of Chinese Americans who are permanently settled there. This has contributed to an increase in the number of remains shipped from China into America. As these communities built their lives, homes, careers and families in the United States, gaining citizenship and coming to think of themselves as Chinese-American (perhaps with an emphasis on the "American"), their need to maintain ties to the old homeland began to fade. Now, as they began to imagine a new

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[297] Wendy L. Rouse, "'What We Didn't Understand': A History of Chinese Death Ritual in China and California," in Chung and Wegars, *Chinese American Death Rituals*, 31.

[298] Rouse, "'What We Didn't Understand,'" 31.

homeland for themselves, the new problem to be overcome was the distance between their ancestors—whose reverence remained a key part of their religious practice—and themselves in their new homeland. The disinterment of the ancestors in their "old" homeland and their reburial in the "new" homeland allowed them to continue their relationship with their ancestral dead. To use the same language with which I described the Corinthians, I argue that what we see in the Chinese-American example I have been describing is the emergence of experimental modes of contact with the ancestral dead. However, the condition of the possibility of this mode of contact is the material and technological resources that would allow the Chinese-Americans the chance to have the bones disinterred, shipped to America, and reburied. This requires considerable monetary outlay on their part, not to mention the presence of communications networks that will allow them to specify which bones are to be dug up, and transportation lines that can ship the bones over such a great distance.

In the Corinthian situation, the material and technological resources are, of course, absent. A population of freed slaves is not likely to be able to afford a mass relocation of their ancestors, even if there were sufficient communication and transportation networks available to coordinate such massive disinterments. Other techniques would have to be found by which to allow the ancestors to be contacted. I suggest that the social attraction of *Christos* was that he provided the Corinthian association with what we may provisionally term a "religious technology" which could make the ancestors accessible even though their tombs remained inaccessible, thus allowing the Corinthians to maintain the integrity of their kinship systems.

This resonates closely with a thesis proposed by Smith in "Re: Corinthians," where he suggests "[s]ome Corinthians may have understood Paul as providing them, in the figure of Christ, with a more proximate mobile ancestor," with the reason being that "celestial figures often have a mobile advantage over chthonic ones who are more readily bound to a place."[299] Although I wonder whether Smith makes too fine a distinction between "celestial" and "chthonic" figures on the basis of mobility alone,[300] Smith's argument regarding the mobility of *Christos* is important and should not be ignored. I would point to a remark he makes in *Drudgery Divine* for assistance in understanding how a chthonic figure could nonetheless be mobile. Noting that most mystery cults seem to be "locative" in character, Smith observes with interest that this rarely means these locative cults are tied to a particular locus. Eleusis seems to be the exception. He points to the mysteries of Dionysus as an example of a widespread, locative, even chthonic tradition that was never tied to a cult center.[301] He also suggests, regarding the Christian traditions, that the empty tomb story found in the gospel of Mark may be evidence for a locative-yet-mobile Christianity: "The locus is recognized, but relativized from a cultic point of view. It no longer contains the body of the powerful dead."[302]

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[299] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 351.

[300] This is because the Hellenistic age saw a flourishing of chthonic deities alongside the relocated celestial figures (so Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 8), and it would be a mistake to assume that all religious groups should have revered celestial figures over against chthonic ones, despite the prominence of the Ptolemaic cosmology. It would seem the general chthonic preoccupation we have witnessed in Corinth would make it a prime candidate for such a survival of "ancient" religiosity (recalling Bruce Lincoln's terminology).

[301] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 142 n. 43.

[302] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 142 n. 43.

In light of the evidence that Dionysus had, from ancient times, strong Underworld connections, eventually coming to be regarded as a god of the dead in his own right,[303] without ever being tied to a single locus; that, at Corinth, we may very well be dealing with a Christ association where *Christos* was imagined by some Corinthians as a chthonic-yet-mobile figure. Certainly his status as a figure located firmly within the sphere of the dead—a location suggested to us by some Corinthians' denial of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:12)—would have encouraged an Underworld location—or, at least, a location in the realm of the dead. If the cultural imagination of Corinth was orientated toward the realm of the dead during this time, as the archaeological record seems to show, it may have seemed only natural that *Christos*, should have been received as a powerful figure in the realm of the dead.

The surprising extent to which the Corinthian Christ association seems preoccupied with funerary concerns suggests a further aspect to *Christos* as some Corinthians imagined him. In light of the general concern with the realm of the dead, the popularity of chthonic deities, the presence of rituals that display a concern for the dead, and the general "locative" character of this association, it seems plausible that *Christos* was imagined by some Corinthians not only as a chthonic figure, but also as something like a powerful *lord* of the dead. I suggest that the "anointment" aspect of the *Christos* label was taken up in an act of mythmaking by the Corinthians as a play on the themes of anointment for burial (cf. Mark 14:8; 16:1; Matt 26:6-12) and anointment for kingship. Like Osiris, whose mummification "united his limbs" so that he could be rejuvenated and live in the Underworld as lord of the dead, perhaps Jesus,

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[303] Martin P. Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1957), 116-32.

a powerful figure who had been put to death and given burial rites (including a kind of anointment), was imagined as now living on in the Underworld as the lord of the dead.[304] Many New Testament passages (all non-Pauline) describe Jesus as being a "judge of the living and the dead" (e.g., Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5), so it is not unthinkable that some Corinthians, living in a city with such a strong chthonic emphasis, should have imagined *Christos* as a chthonic figure and powerful lord of the dead.

But why *Christos* in particular? It does, at first blush, seem unnecessary to theorize *Christos* as "lord of the dead" solely for the reason that the Corinthian *Christos* seems to have had something to do with helping the Corinthian Christians maintain access to their dead. Certainly, chthonic figures and *psychopompoi* were numerous, and the Corinthians had other options, if all they wanted was an Underworld figure who could help them get to their dead, or who could bring their dead to them. If kept at this level, I admit that the theory of *Christos chthonios* falls flat.

However, there is no need to keep our description of *Christos chthonios* at this (social, "de-mythologized") level. In this regard, I feel the title of Burton Mack's

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[304] Cf. Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2000), 93, who suggests that "the designation 'Christ' probably denoted 'the Risen One,' reflecting Isis' anointing of the dead Osiris, which restored him to life. It is this anointing which we glimpse behind Mark 16:1 and 14:8." It is unclear whether Price is making a "genealogical" argument, thus claiming that the Isis-Osiris mythology contributed to the logic of the "Christ" appellation. Nor did Osiris' anointment by Isis restore him to (his former mode of) life, as Price claims. Osiris "lived on" in the Underworld, as lord of the dead, and did not return to his former mode of life. Price attempts to argue against this interpretation (as presented by Jonathan Z. Smith) by claiming that "we might as well deny that Jesus is depicting as dying and rising since he reigns henceforth at the right hand of God in Heaven as the judge of the dead, like Osiris" (91). Price apparently fails to see that this is precisely the point: the entire notion of "resurrection" as it is commonly presented in scholarly literature is a later Christian notion that is anachronistic and inappropriate when applied to other Hellenistic religions, including most early forms of Christianity.

essay "Why *Christos*? The Social Reasons,"[305] though asking the right question, may also constitute something of a distraction. When asking "Why *Christos*?" it is not the "social" aspect that we should focus on, for the simple reason that it is not the "social" aspect of *Christos* that would have been most interesting to the Corinthians, but rather the "cultural" or "mythic" aspects! As Luther H. Martin has pointed out (*contra* Mack), "it is precisely the counterfactual claims of myth and not some demythologized (social) meaning that define myth as mythic,"[306] and for this reason, Martin admits, he finds it baffling that Mack apparently wants "to demythologize (in contrast to resituate) the wondrously myth-laden category of *christos* as it had been applied to Jesus."[307] What I propose, then, with respect to the Corinthian *Christos chthonios*, is to assume a more elaborate, "cultural" significance to *Christos*, and to assume, as any theorist interested in religious persistence and change would, that the Corinthians' mythmaking activity decorated the title of their patron deity "by using and reforming the cultural givens with respect to the significance of *Christos*, whether as king, priest, patron, hero, or some mishmash of these cooked in a cosmically flavored Hellenistic marinade."[308] While the *Christos* Paul offered the Corinthians does seem to be a cosmic figure, we have seen (via Horsley) that he still has a profound influence in the terrestrial spheres. For *Christos* to be presented as a

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[305] Burton L. Mack, "Why *Christos*? The Social Reasons," in Cameron and Miller, *Redescribing Christian Origins*, 365-74.

[306] Luther H. Martin, "Redescribing Christian Origins: Historiography or Exegesis?," in Cameron and. Miller, *Redescribing Christian Origins*, 478.

[307] Martin, "Redescribing Christian Origins," 478 n. 11.

[308] Braun, "Smoke Signals from the North," 434. Although I recognize that Braun is not addressing, in this quote, the Corinthian *Christos*, but is discussing the figure of *Christos* more generally, in the context of the Hellenistic world, I would—for the purposes of *this* discussion—take issue with Braun's terminology of "cosmic," not because I do not regard *Christos* as a cosmic figure (at least in *some* sense), but rather because it may somewhat obscure a fascinating aspect of the Corinthian *Christos*.

counter-imperial figure who would soon tread the nations of the earth beneath his feet shows that he was not thought of as too strictly celestial. Therefore, our terminology of "cosmic" *versus* "chthonic" may be too strict a division: like the terminology of "Classical" or "Late Antique," these terms are second-order heuristics that should not be ontologized, as if it were always an either-or distinction. Therefore, considering the Pauline *Christos* in light of the profound chthonic preoccupations we find in first-century Corinth, and the commensurate preoccupation of the Corinthian Christ association, I propose that we look for a cosmic *Christos* "cooked" in a *chthonically* flavored Hellenistic marinade, and see what juicy new insights we can conjure up.

When we classify the Corinthian *Christos* as a cosmic figure "cooked" in a chthonic marinade, we are immediately struck by Paul's confession that he resolved to proclaim nothing to the Corinthians except for "Christ crucified." From a chthonic perspective, this would make *Christos* a *biaiothanatos*—one who had died violently. Indeed, the fact of his crucifixion—the mode of execution by which the Roman Empire subjugated the Mediterranean world—would have made him a *biaiothanatos par excellence*. Recalling the counter-imperial message of the cross that is emphasized in Horsley's volume *Paul and Empire*, it seems that the idea of "anointing" (*Christos*) a *biaiothanatos* would be a very bold and daunting maneuver, which would have been quite jarring to the Corinthians. The connection of the two terms would send ripples along several semiotic registers. Just think of the virtual cornucopia of possible connotations: *Christos* the "anointed" king, *Christos* the priest, the patron, the hero, and even *Christos imperator*—not to mention the possible connection with "anointment" for burial! Given the Corinthians' interest in the spirits

of their ancestors in their homelands—now inaccessible in the imperial/colonial situation of Corinth—as well as their recent dead, I can see how the *biaiothanatos Christos chthonios*, an "emperor of the underworld" who could give the Corinthians access to his "subjects" (the Corinthian ancestral dead) across the "empire" would be a very attractive patron deity indeed, *especially* if the Corinthians were already meeting as an association interested in developing new ways of maintaining their traditions of ancestral reverence.

The evidence that this figure was being used in cursing practices (1 Cor 12:3) only serves to strengthen this argument. Curses were almost always directed toward powerful figures associated with the realm of the dead, in hopes that they would mobilize the souls of the dead or some other chthonic agent to enact the curse. In fact, if *Christos* were being invoked in curses, then the practice of baptism for the dead may have had yet another significant aspect: the souls of "uninitiated" dead (*ateletoi*) were often the ones used in curses.[309] The dead who had undergone mystery initiations were safe from being "used" in such a manner. Perhaps these Corinthians were also initiating their dead into their "mysteries" so that they would be safe from all the curses that were being invoked in Corinth during this time, in addition to the desire to relieve them of the miseries of the uninitiated in the realm of the dead. It is probably not an either/or alternative: initiating them into mysteries and allowing their souls to find safe haven both protected them from the dangerous powers in the underworld as well as from the threat of being forced to enact a curse against their will. Smith's proposal that both the ancestral dead in the homeland and the recently departed dead were objects of cultic attention—whether conceived of as supplications

[309] Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 78.

to receive esoteric wisdom (from the ancestral dead) or more mundane oracular guidance (from the recent dead)—might suggest part of the "need" for a powerful lord of the dead, who could help these Corinthians negotiate the difficulties involved in contacting and maintaining relations with these dead. Also, considering how volatile the dead could be in the cultural imagination of the time, it might not have been a bad idea to have such a lord of the dead who could offer protection from any dangerous chthonic demons or angry spirits one might inadvertently conjure up. And if Johnston is right in assuming that "the dead [were] imagined as messengers between this world and the next, carrying the words [of the living] to deities in the underworld,"[310] then our entire conception of how the Corinthian Christians "prayed in the spirit" has to be redescribed. In the final chapter, I will return to Arnal's arguments, reviewed above, and attempt such a redescription.

[310] Sarah Iles Johnston, "Songs for the Ghosts: Magical Solutions to Deadly Problems," in *The World of Ancient Magic: Papers from the First International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athen, 4-8 May 1997* (ed. David R. Jordan et al.; Bergen: The Norwegian Institute at Athens, 1999), 85.

5) Speaking in Tongues, Dancing with Ghosts

> [W]hat interests us here is not so much the connections between phenomena as the connections between problems.
> – Valentin N. Vološinov[311]

Before concluding this study, there is one troublesome aspect of the previous redescriptions that needs to be addressed. Throughout this study, I have persisted in categorizing the Corinthian Christ association as "locative." Yet one of the most salient features of Paul's "gospel" is his insistence upon the resurrection of the dead—an image that would seem totally inappropriate within a "locative" socio-religious formation. The problem we are therefore faced with can be phrased as follows: how does a socio-religious formation with primarily "locative" characteristics nonetheless find resurrection language attractive, *while remaining* "locative," when one of the fundamental precepts of "locative" religions is that the dead should remain dead?

While it will take some time to formulate an answer, it should be noted from the outset that what is at stake here may be nothing less than the utility of the locative-utopian dichotomy itself. These categories need to be clarified and rectified in order to remain useful to the study of religion. While it has not always been made explicit, much of the work undertaken so far in this study has been performed in an effort to use 1 Corinthians as a "test-case" for the "locative" category. As stated in the introduction, this study represents an attempt to use early Christian data in service of the larger enterprise of the history of religions.

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[311] Valentin N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), xv.

With this in mind, it might be best to juxtapose the Corinthian data with a situational analogy in an act of cross-cultural comparison. This juxtaposition may suggest certain insights into why "locative" traditions based on avoidance of the dead may nonetheless adopt resurrection language without thereby taking on the characteristics of a "utopian" tradition. To do this, I will briefly compare the first-century Corinthian Christ association's emergence in the Roman East with the nineteenth-century American Indian Ghost Dance's emergence in the American West, and see what generalizations may be made about the nature of "locative" traditions.

My description of the Ghost Dance will be necessarily limited both by space considerations as well as the enormous complexity of the phenomenon. However, I should also point out that this limitation is theoretically-stipulated and strategically imposed: the search for a situational analogy to the Corinthian Christ association necessarily limits the economy of significance within which the Ghost Dance data may operate. Furthermore, it will be limited because I wish to establish parity between the specificity of the Corinthian Christ association within the larger context of early Christianities and one specific "site" of the Ghost Dance religion within the broader context of this pan-Indian movement. As a result, I need not examine the famous widespread Ghost Dance movement of 1890, which was led by the prophet Wovoka in response to a revelation he received during an eclipse of the sun. Instead, I turn to the earlier, but related Ghost Dance movement of 1870 as it developed among the Northern Paiute (Numu) people on the Walker River Reservation in western Nevada. When placed beside the vast literature on the 1890 Ghost Dance, this movement seems comparatively under-studied, although the two movements are quite

similar in many respects. James Mooney's well-known study of the 1890 Ghost Dance, published in 1896,[312] was the first to call attention to the 1870 movement, and there was no other study of the Walker River Ghost Dance until Cora Du Bois' brief 1939 survey.[313] It was not until 1973 that Michael Hittman devoted careful attention to this movement, and it is primarily upon his article "The 1870 Ghost Dance at the Walker River Reservation: A Reconstruction,"[314] that the following will rely. Under-studied or not, it seems to me that the 1870 Ghost Dance as it developed on this particular reservation may prove to be one of the most helpful analogies to the Corinthian situation in the history of religions.[315]

The movement likely have originated among the Northern Paiute of the Walker River Reservation around 1869 in response to the message of the prophet Wodziwob, alternately known as Fish Lake Joe. It seems Wodziwob first announced his revelations at the traditional Paiute Round Dance, when he commanded his audience to paint their faces before dancing and then to bathe themselves after the dance. He proclaimed that if the Paiute would continually dance in this manner, then

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[312] James Mooney, "The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux outbreak of 1890," *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, Part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896).

[313] Cora Du Bois, *The 1870 Ghost Dance* (Anthropological Records, vol. 3, no. 1; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939).

[314] Michael Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance at the Walker River Reservation: A Reconstruction," *Ethnohistory* 20 (1973), 247-78.

[315] William Arnal ("*Doxa*, Heresy, and Self-Construction") has already suggested that in terms of "the actual situation of the proponents of this movement; in terms of the use of tradition, syncretism, and innovation; in terms of ideology and structure; in terms of evangelization and the spread of the message; in terms of the variety of its various manifestations, and in terms of the reaction of the ruling military powers," there may be no closer analogy to the emergence and development of early Christianities than the emergence and development of the Ghost Dances. If the fecundity of the Corinthian comparisons with the Walker River Reservation are any indication, I am inclined to agree with Arnal.

their "fathers and mothers" would return "pretty soon." When this occurred, Wodziwob said, everybody would "be happy."[316] Wodziwob apparently did not clarify the meaning of these instructions until after the ceremony had ended, when he entered a trance, during which his soul reportedly visited the land of the dead, far to the south. When he emerged from this trance state, he told his audience where he had been, and "told individual members of his audience that he had seen their deceased relations, that they were enjoying themselves (e.g., hunting successfully), and that they would soon return to earth."[317] After this initial prophecy, Wodziwob continued to preach the return of the dead, which he claimed would occur within four years. He even used displays of power, perhaps involving the creative use of dynamite, to emphasize the authority of his preaching.[318] At first, Wodziwob's preaching was received with some enthusiasm, but after a few years the popularity of the movement on the Walker River Reservation had waned.

While the reasons for the movement's obsolescence will not concern us here, the reasons for its initial *success* have great heuristic value for our imagination of the Corinthian situation. Scholars have proposed several theories for why the Ghost Dance was attractive to the Paiute on the Walker River Reservation, with deprivation theory providing the most popular explanation ever since James Mooney first proposed a version of the "deprivation hypothesis." By contrast, Cora Du Bois adopted a "diffusionist" perspective, which proposed "a recurring native pattern" in

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[316] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 250-51.

[317] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 251.

[318] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 251; cf. Du Bois, *The 1870 Ghost Dance*, 5.

Northern Paiute culture that would account for the movement's emergence.[319] I favour Hittman's attempted synthesis, which acknowledges the importance of Paiute cultural elements in shaping the movement while also emphasizing "deprivation" as a causal factor. Hittman also cautions that these factors alone are not sufficient to understand the movement, pointing as well to the *colonial* context of the Ghost Dance movement, which in large part established the conditions that led to the Paiute experience of "deprivation" in the first place. From this perspective, the redeployment of those Paiute cultural elements that shaped the Ghost Dance can be described as a religio-cultural response to Euro-American expansionism.

The history of contact between the Northern Paiute and the American settlers makes clear why deprivation theories have been so popular. First contact between Euro-Americans and the Northern Paiute seems to have occurred in 1827, but did not begin to disrupt the Paiute cultural patterns until after 1845, when foreign settlements in the area of Walker Lake began to have a "cataclysmic effect upon Paiute culture."[320] Miners clear-cut pine groves for lumber to construct their mining-shafts, and ranchers began to graze large herds of cattle, depriving the Paiute of pine nuts and wild grasses, respectively, both of which were important food sources.[321] After a decade or so of violent resistance by the Paiute, the federal government pacified them and established the Walker River Reservation in 1860, where the Paiute re-settled.

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[319] So Gregory E. Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity: Prophetic Religion and American Indian Ethnogenesis in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 115.

[320] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 252.

[321] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 252.

Despite the promises made to them by the United States government, things did not improve for the Paiute post-1860. Drought made it difficult to grow food, and the government did not provide the technical assistance in adopting modern farming methods they had promised the Walker River Reservation Paiute. Fish were plentiful in the river, and this provided a valuable source of both food and income to the Paiute, but it was not long before over-fishing depleted this food. The drought continued until 1872 and led to a serious famine that left the Paiute with very little food.[322] Many Paiute lived at subsistence level. This harsh state of deprivation was only exacerbated by the onset of several epidemics that struck between the months of August and October, 1867.[323] These outbreaks were followed by a measles epidemic that struck in the spring of 1868. Together, these epidemics proved fatal to a large percentage of the Northern Paiute population at the Walker River Reservation.[324] This, then, was the seedbed in which the 1870 Ghost Dance arose.

It makes sense, then, that when Wodziwob began to prophesy "the resurrection of the dead and the restoration of the environment to its state prior to Euro-American expansionism," that these prophecies "would have had great appeal to the Walker River Reservation Paiute."[325] In fact, Hittman argues that "Wodziwob's role can be defined as that of a crisis-broker, and resurrection of the dead and weather control [which Wodziwob claimed to be capable of] can be seen as time-honored and

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[322] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 254.

[323] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 255.

[324] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 256.

[325] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 260.

time-tested Paiute techniques of crisis-mediation."[326] Hittman argues that the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, which seems "strikingly at odds with the ethnographic fact of Northern Paiute ritual avoidance of the dead,"[327] was attractive to the Paiute because of the devastating rupture that had recently occurred within the Northern Paiute kinship system as a result of the recent epidemics.[328] This rupture in the kinship system would have occasioned many necessary changes in what I would classify as a "locative" religion of "here," because many Northern Paiute cultural traits display a careful ritual avoidance of the dead. Hittman lists a few, which he culls from various ethnographies: "immediate burial of the dead; destruction of all personal belonging; a 'talker' who at the gravesite pleaded with the soul not to return from the land of the dead and bother the living; prohibition against mentioning the name of the dead person; relocation of campsite."[329]

Hittman notes that Wodziwob came from among the Fish Lake Valley Paiute (hence the name, "Fish Lake Joe"), a Paiute group that did not share the strict codes of ritual avoidance of the dead that so characterized the Northern Paiute. Therefore, Hittman argues, Wodziwob was able to "convert" the Northern Paiute to a tradition based upon the resurrection of the dead by "grafting" the Fish Lake Valley Paiute ceremony of the "cry dance" onto the pre-existing Northern Paiute "Round Dance." The "cry dance" was an annual mourning ceremony, held by the Fish Lake Valley Paiute to honor their ancestors, and the Round Dance was an "increase rite" intended

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[326] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 260.

[327] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 264.

[328] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 262.

[329] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 265.

to provide food sources to the Northern Paiute. By turning the Round Dance into a mourning dance, Wodziwob was effectively creating a community-healing rite that would allow the Walker River Reservation Paiute to overcome the recent rupture in the kinship system and maintain controlled contact with their dead. In this way, the environment would be returned to pre-contact conditions. Furthermore, since the 1890 Ghost Dance seems to have been identical *in practice* to the way Dances were held in 1870—a plausible assertion, since Wovoka probably learned the dance from his father Tavivo, a follower of Wodziwob[330]—we can perhaps make use of ethnographic reports of this dance, which describe dancers falling out of the circle and wiggling on the ground, as if in a trance, or even talking to spirits that they saw while dancing.[331] This furthers the hypothesis that the Ghost Dance made possible a ritually controlled—and therefore non-polluting—mode of contact with the ancestral dead.

Finally, to complete our presentation of the Ghost Dance data: Hittman reports that not all of the Northern Paiute accepted Wodziwob's prophecy of the resurrection of the dead, and many denied it right up until the movement's obsolescence.[332]

If we juxtapose the data just reviewed to the Corinthian data already presented in this study, several connections present themselves. At the *situational* level, the enormous differences between these two sets of data can be negotiated by saying,

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[330] As implied by Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge Studies in North American Indian History; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 244.

[331] So Michael Hittman, "The 1890 Ghost Dance in Nevada," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 16 (1992), 146-47; cf John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Ogalala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 241.

[332] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 251, 267.

generally, that we are dealing with experimental socio-religious formations that appear to be "translations" of older practices in response to changed social conditions. Here, the social condition seems aptly described as *colonial*: the Walker River Reservation is analogous to Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis, and the relatively recent, forced re-settlement of the Paiute onto the Reservation suggests some situational analogy to the relatively recent, forced re-settlement of freed slaves into Corinth. And, while there does seem to be evidence that Corinth experienced a number of serious grain shortages (i.e., famines) in the middle of the first century—precisely when the Christ association would have been emerged—I would caution against making too much of this parallel.[333] I doubt that "deprivation" can be named as a causal factor in the Corinthian situation in the same way as to the Walker River Reservation Paiutes—although, if kept at the level of *concomitance*, the hypothesis would merit greater attention. Still, we can generalize and say that both groups have experienced a relatively recent rupture in their respective kinship systems: the Walker River Reservation Paiutes from deaths caused by epidemics, and the Corinthian Christians from forced inaccessibility to the tombs of their ancestors. Furthermore, both groups can be described as "relatively homogenous," if *culturally* heterogeneous. And, most importantly, both groups formed at a time when the colonizing powers were developing a grand-scale, more or less "universal" identity, whether it was "American" or "Roman" identity.

This last point is one I take from Gregory E. Smoak, who concludes his *Ghost Dances and Identity* by pointing out that the Ghost Dances occurred at a time when

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[333] But see Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 215-25, for a description of the social unrest caused by such grain shortages.

evangelical Protestant identity more or less defined what it meant to be "American," and that this "white, middle-class, native-born, and Protestant" identity was by far the dominant definition of "American."[334] Religious language—even prophetic language, as evangelical Protestantism was marked by millenarian fervor—was used to define national identity. Smoak points to a number of similar instances among American Indians. A Delaware holy man called Neolin prophesied, in 1761, a pan-Indian revival that would end with the removal of the Europeans, who blocked the native's path to heaven. After the French and Indian War, the Ottawa Pontiac used Neolin's prophecy to unite Indian warriors from several tribes to make war against the British and stop their expansion into Indian territories. One hundred years later, a Shawnee prophet named Tenskwatawa preached a similar vision, while his brother Tecumseh "led the political and military resistance against white expansion that promised to unite native peoples from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes."[335] Smoak rightly points out that, while studies of these movements have "consistently cast the intertribal, prophetic nativism inherent in the respective religions as one aspect of an emerging American Indian nationalism, due in no small part to the direct ties between the religious prophecies and the political and military movements led by the iconic leaders Pontiac and Tecumseh," the millenarian nativisms that emerged farther west have not been classified "in terms of emergent identity but rather as narrower reactions to colonization and deprivation."[336] This is despite the fact that the Ghost Dances, the Dreamer religion, the Prophet Dances, and other such movements "all

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[334] Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 197.

[335] Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 198.

[336] Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 198.

exhibited to one degree or another the unifying pan-Indian spirit of the earlier religions."[337] Smoak suggests, quite rightly I believe, that the lack of overtly *political* or *military* leaders has prevented these movements from being classified as emergent "nationalisms." He points out, very suggestively, that all of these movements arose precisely when

> the evangelical American identity was fully formed and dominant and at the very time that a shared American Indian identity emerged as meaningful. This was no accident of history. The Ghost Dances were a prophetic expression of an American Indian identity that countered American attempts to assert a particular identity and to impose that vision on American Indians.[338]

In this respect, it would seem that Paul's counter-imperialism and the "counter-nationalism" of the ghost dancers are very strongly analogous. This suggests the possibility of imagining the Corinthian situation and the Walker River Ghost Dance situation as analogous, both at the level of their immediate, *colonial* context, and also in their larger, *imperial* context. The religio-cultural enunciations that we find within these two sets of data can therefore be seen as responses by "locative" traditions to analogous social situations.

As might be expected, then, the religio-cultural enunciations in the Ghost Dance data find many parallels in the Corinthian data. Most striking, at first glance, is that the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:12) and the Walker River Paiutes share an ambivalence toward resurrection language. Hittman characterizes this as a "lack of fit" between the

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[337] Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 198.

[338] Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 198.

Northern Paiute traditions and Wodziwob's resurrection prophecy,[339] stating that, "since the Walker River Reservation Paiute population was culturally heterogeneous, the meaning and understanding of [the] Ghost Dance doctrine [of resurrection] would naturally have varied."[340] I see no reason why the Corinthian Christians should not be understood in the same way.

Just as Wodziwob "grafted" the cry dance onto the Round Dance to produce a new mode of contact with the dead that would also result in a "healing of the land," so too it seems that Paul "grafted" the *ekklēsia* model onto the Corinthians' pre-existing practices—such as meeting for meals—and thus provided them with a way to maintain relations with the ancestors *while also* founding an assembly that would survive the coming judgment, when *Christos* would trample the imperial powers under his feet and establish the kingdom of God, thus "healing the Empire." This analogy, more than any other, makes plausible the hypothesis, presented in this study, that an association interested in maintaining contact with the ancestors and highly focused upon a cult of the dead, would also find a counter-imperial "gospel" attractive, and respond accordingly.

Finally, I would point to the long discussions regarding "speaking in tongues" that Paul includes in his letter to the Corinthians as evidence for something analogous to the "spirit possessions" or trance-like states that occurred within the Ghost Dance circles: a tradition where contact with the dead was to be avoided at all costs has now been reformulated (we might say "translated") to allow such contact in a ritually-controlled way. This "translation" has occurred, in both instances, in response to a

[339] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 267.

[340] Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance," 266.

perceived rupture in the kinship system—through deaths by famine and epidemic in the Walker River Paiute situation, and through forced distance from the ancestors' graves in the Corinthian Christian situation. Thus, speaking in tongues and dancing with ghosts appear to be functionally analogous.

Conclusion

Looking back upon what I have accomplished, I suggest that our redescribed Christ group fits well within the social category of a voluntary association that met within large-scale households,[341] and in fact created fictive kinship ties between members of the association. These ties ensured that the members of the association (addressed as "brothers" and "sisters") would look after one another as if they really were family members. This would have included ensuring that each member received a proper burial, a thesis that is strengthened by the fact that most voluntary associations did act as burial societies to some extent. Though I am not prepared, in this study, to argue this point any further, I suggest that the most plausible site for our Corinthian Christ association is a voluntary association consisting of a network of households, which acted as a fictive kin group that ensured each "family member" received a proper burial. The "chthonic" concerns that pervaded Corinth in the mid-first century, the multiple ethnicities that would have made up this group and exacerbated the concern for the ancestral dead, and the attention given the recent dead would have contributed to the formation of a group whose mythmaking activity exhibited a profound preoccupation with death, the dead, and the realm of the dead.

Furthermore, the counter-imperial nature of Paul's message may well have occasioned an extraordinarily robust process of mythmaking among the Corinthian Christians. It seems there is evidence for a mythic universe populated by the spirits of the dead, an emperor of the Underworld, experimental modes of contact with

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[341] Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 75-80. See also Kloppenborg, "Collegia and *Thiasoi*."

chthonic figures and the ancestral dead, postmortem variations of initiation rites, translations of festivals and meals by the tomb, translations of the "sanctifying" soteriology of a religion of "here" into a sanctifying logic of a religion of "anywhere," and so much more. The practice of assuming Pauline categories as normative for understanding the Corinthian situation, coupled with the use of the implausible model of the "creation and fall" of the Corinthian church, have obstructed many previous attempts to understand what the Corinthians were up to.

The categories by which I have classified and endeavoured to understand this Christ association ("locative" traditions, religions of "here," religions of "anywhere") have, in the process of this study, been clarified considerably. We should not see religions of "anywhere," for example, as strictly or necessarily utopian in nature. Our Christ association at Corinth is clearly a locative religion of "anywhere." Furthermore, one interesting thing we have learned is that while a religion of "anywhere" is peculiarly *atopian* in that it has no necessary ties to a given place, it may nonetheless become a religion of "here" through the "sanctifying" logic of locative religious traditions. This teaches us that locative traditions, once dis-placed, need not turn into a religion of "no place" (e.g., a utopian religion), but may reverse their "sanctifying" tendency to *keep* a place and begin to cultivate and *make* a new place. And, most interesting of all, in the event of a rupture in the kinship system, members of locative formations may actually adopt resurrection language in order to maintain contact with their dead until they can re-emplace their traditions of ancestral

reverence. This insight is a step forward in the development of the locative/utopian theoretical apparatus contributed by the work of Jonathan Z. Smith.[342]

As this study has shown, it is not only possible to allow the data domain of Hellenistic religions to elucidate one specific site within that domain, but also possible, through comparison, to allow a specific site—in this case, the Corinthian Christ association—to aid us in understanding Hellenistic religions through clarifying our categories. These categories are also amenable to comparison with cross-cultural and trans-temporal data. In this way, we ensure that our study is part of a larger field—the academic study of religion—and that our work is able to generate "e.g.'s" by which our categories can be illustrated and our theories tested. In this regard, I submit that the model of a semiotic theory of religion will aid us in understanding the Hellenistic religious system[343] as a complex of traditions involved in reinterpreting archaic Mediterranean religions in response to the changed social and cultural "landscape" of the Hellenistic and Late Antique periods—especially if coupled with an "analogical" method of comparison—without necessarily bogging scholars down

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[342] These categories have long been in need of clarification and rectification, but to my knowledge no such study as yet exists. Part of the problem is the enormous degree of polyvalence in the meaning of these terms as they have been used by Smith throughout his career. A further difficulty is presented by the fact that, in the clearest exposition to date of what is meant by the "locative" category (Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 110. 121-42), the "utopian" category is left almost entirely undeveloped, with the result being that the "utopian" worldview appears only as the constitutive Other of the locative worldview.

However, leaving these considerations aside, I note that in the corpus of Smith's work, the description of the "locative" category that I have offered most closely accords with the description presented in "The Temple and the Magician, " in *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity, 23; Leiden: Brill, 1978; repr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 186-89. Smith begins by noting that "the diasporic, utopian, rebellious world-view has been [most often] taken as characteristic of Late Antiquity," then states that "a more complex model is called for—one that might better account for a large class of cultic phenomena that exhibit characteristics of mobility…*and* which represent both a reinterpretation and a reaffirmation of native, locative, celebratory categories of religious practices and thought" (186). This model closely resonates with the description of the Corinthian Christ association I have provided in this study.

[343] See Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 155-62, for a general sense of what I mean by "Hellenistic religious system."

with the overly "technical" terminology so often used, with greater or lesser success, in semiotic theories. The redescription of the Corinthian situation this study offers is but one example of how this can be accomplished.

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